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A GUARDIAN ANGEL.



VOL. II.

A

GUARDIAN **A**NGEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM,”

ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A GUARDIAN ANGEL.

CHAPTER I.

N a large and handsomely furnished drawing-room sat a lady richly dressed. In her lap lay a beautiful little dog, with whose silken ears her jewelled fingers were playing. Though no longer young, she bore traces of great personal beauty—that is to say, beauty of feature, for there was *that* in the expression of her face which would render her

claim to beauty, in the opinion of many, very questionable. Leaning with one arm upon the chimney-piece was a gentleman, some ten or twelve years her senior, who appeared to be listening with much interest to what she was telling him.

"Then you would not object to my keeping her, my dear, if she likes to come? She is so very pretty, and I like pretty people about me."

"Not in the least, my love, if you wish it, Did she say anything about that unfortunate young man?"

"Nothing more than that she was his foster-sister."

"Have you promised to see her again, to make arrangements about her coming?"

"Yes, she is to come to me again to-morrow."

At this moment a servant entered, bearing a note upon a waiter, which he handed to his mistress.

"Any answer?" she asked.

"The person is waiting to know, ma'am," said the man.

Mrs. Aylmer opened the note, and a hot flush covered her face as she quickly closed it, and said to the man—

"Tell them I'll send."

The man left the room.

"What is it, my love?" asked her husband.

"Oh, nothing—only a little bill."

"Was it not a pity, then, to send them

away, if they want the money?" said Mr. Aylmer.

"Oh, no; I can't be bothered now; it is an inconvenient time to send."

And hastily changing the conversation, she said—

"By the bye, I must see Fred before I go out."

Rising hurriedly, she left the room, dropping as she did so the note she had just received. Mr. Aylmer stooped to pick it up, and with some excusable curiosity glanced at what Mrs. Aylmer had called a little bill. It was as follows:—

"MADAM,

"In consequence of our many previous applications having hitherto remained un-

answered, I have to acquaint you that unless your account to Christmas last, amounting to 230*l.* 15*s.* 1*d.*, be immediately paid, I must request my solicitor to communicate with Mr. Aylmer.

“ Your obedient servant,

J. DE CHAMPS.”

Astonished beyond measure at this most unexpected sight, Mr. Aylmer folded the note, and calmly placing it in his pocket, rang the bell.

“ My desk, Waltham, from the study, if you please, and then wait; I want you to go out.”

The man soon returned, bearing the desk, and having placed it on the table, waited

near the door until his master had written the note.

Mr. Aylmer, opening his desk, wrote a cheque for the sum requested by Madame de Champs; and enclosing it in an envelope, with a few lines stating that Mrs. Aylmer forwarded the amount of her bill, and would be obliged by a receipt, he sealed and directed it, and handing it to the man, bid him go with it directly.

Mrs. Aylmer had gone out for her afternoon drive, and they did not meet any more till dinner.

After the cloth was removed and the servants had left the room, Mr. Aylmer handed a note across the table to his wife, and, with a kind smile, said—

"There's a present for you, my love; but I would not run such large scores for the future."

She opened it wonderingly, and with mixed feelings of joy and shame, found it was the receipt of Madame de Champs' bill.

"You must excuse my pardonable curiosity," said Mr. Aylmer. "You dropped the little bill as you left the room, and I was tempted to look at it. Women's vanities seem expensive."

"You always like me to dress well," she began, in a fretful voice.

"I do, I do; but we will say no more about it now," he answered, with a glance at his son, who was quietly sipping his claret. "Have one glass of wine, love?"

“No, thank you,” she answered, sulkily; and rising at once from the table, she walked off into the drawing-room, with a manner which would have been more suitable had her husband advertized in the paper that he would not be answerable for her debts, instead of having just paid an exorbitant bill without a murmur or reproach. The evening was, in consequence, less lively than usual; she complained of headache, and would neither play nor sing; Fred went to sleep, and Mr. Aylmer read the evening paper.

The next morning, between ten and eleven, Mrs. Aylmer was told that the young woman had called, and she desired her to be shown into the library. She went down, and there, looking even prettier than usual, sat Dora

Elphick. Dora had told her aunt on the previous day, that after dinner she should much like to go and call on Mr. Aylmer, the father of her foster-brother ; he had been very kind to her always ; she should like to see him and inquire how Mr. Harry was. Thinking this a reasonable request, her aunt consented, and, with many injunctions not to lose herself, she sent her off on her mission. Dora saw only Mrs. Aylmer, who, fascinated by her pretty face and manners, took a fancy to engage her to work for her and assist her own maid, whom her mistress certainly kept thoroughly well employed. The final arrangements were to be concluded on this morning—as far at least as they could be until the parents had been consulted ; and as it furthered the scheme

she had formed in her mind beyond her most sanguine hopes, Dora gladly agreed to the proposal, and hoped to meet with no opposition from her father and mother; so the interview terminated that morning with the agreement that on receiving a consent from home, she should at once take up her residence in Mr. Aylmer's family.

On her return, Mrs. Robinson was greatly surprised to hear of the proposed plan, and having taken a great fancy to Dora, she was pleased with the idea of her living in London, and hoped "her poor, foolish mother would not stand in her girl's light; for there was a much better hope of her establishing herself well in London than smothered down in that out-of-the-way place, Bradleigh. Such a good-

looking girl as she was would have a chance of making a good match, if she minded what she was about."

Dora laughed and blushed, and said she was in no hurry.

"Well, I can only say, my dear," continued her aunt, "I should be sorry to see you throw yourself away on a clodhopping fellow, who does not know B from a bull's foot; so I hope you haven't left your heart in the country."

This time Dora blushed without laughing, and turning away to hide it, changed the conversation to the subject as to whether the answer to her appeal would be consent or not. By return of post came a long, complaining letter from her mother, concluding, however,

with saying that it was her father's wish that she should please herself; so she might stay for three months, if that would satisfy the lady.

Mrs. Aylmer agreed to this arrangement, and early in the following week Dora took up her residence in Mr. Aylmer's handsome mansion in Hyde Park Gardens, with a room of her own, which was a strange contrast to the little one with its latticed window in her village home at Bradleigh.





CHAPTER II.



HE cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which Edith Lascelles had feared was looming over her brother's married home, grew daily larger and larger. Geraldine's utter ignorance of all household matters, and her determination not to ask any advice from Edith, were causing the greatest confusion. And Edith was sadly worried; she foresaw it all—all the vexation and irritation that must ensue, if not worse, from the reckless expendi-

ture and bad management. The morning Dora went away, thinking that news of Harry might cheer her, Edith took her way, soon after breakfast, to Elphick's cottage. She found the old woman crying, and lamenting bitterly the loss of her daughter, from whom she had received a note stating that she had gone to London, but where to, or what for, it was impossible for her to imagine.

"Her father's 'most distracted,'" said the poor old woman. "A young, likely girl like her to be gone off to that awful place! We shall never rest in our beds till she comes back, I know."

"But have you no idea what she can be gone for?" asked Edith, who was astonished herself at the news.

"Not the least, miss. She seemed very

thoughtful and serious-like lately, which has pleased father, because he always reckoned her giddy; but it was only t'other night I said to him, says I, 'Father, it ain't natural for our gal to be so staid-like, and I'm mistook if something ain't wrong with her.' You see, miss, natur is natur, and a person born cheerful is a'most allays so, unless there's something very wrong."

"It is strange," said Edith. "Doesn't she tell you where to write to her?"

"No, not a word; only as I am to send to her cousin Sally, to let her know she's gone, and that she's to come and do anything I want for me. But I haven't sent, for I haven't got the heart to do nothing but sit here and wish and wish her back again."

"Dora seemed such a good girl," said Edith ;
"she must have some good reason for going ;
and the best way for you to show your love
and trust in her, is to be as cheerful as you
can till she returns, and believe that she will
come back to you and give you an excellent
reason for going. You have not seen any-
thing — seen anything — of — of — of — Mr.
Aylmer lately—have you?"

"No, my dear—miss, I mean. Leastways,
not since the day you were here last. He
came over then in the evening."

"Did he seem quite well then?"

"Oh, yes ; and in better spirits than
common."

Edith did not like to ask any more ques-
tions of the old woman ; it was not like talking,

to Dora. So, saying she would look in to-morrow or the next day to inquire if there had been any tidings of her daughter, she shook the old woman kindly by the hand, and returned home, not much enlivened by her visit.

Geraldine and Herbert were both out driving when Edith returned, but she had not been seated long in the drawing-room, when the cook, who did not often appear in the upper regions at that time of day, asked to speak a word or two to her.

"Oh, yes, cook ; what is it?" said Edith, kindly.

"Well, miss, I thought, as missus was out, I'd just embrace this opportunity of speaking to you about Susan's goings on."

"Oh, dear, cook !" interrupted Edith,

"pray don't tell me ; I would so much rather you told your mistress."

"But, my dear young lady, it ain't no use ; she won't believe one word against her."

"Oh, yes, I think she will now ; for it was only the other day she was complaining to me about her extravagance."

"Extravagance indeed, miss ! The fact is, she has got a sweetheart in the place, and things get taken to him till I can't stand it no longer. I said I'd tell, and she said, says she, 'Well, if you do, mark my words, I'll tell of you.' And really, miss," continued cook, putting her apron to her eyes, and squeezing out a few tears, "what she's got to tell is nothing more than about the dripping and stuff ; and I am sure I don't want to tell no

stories about that. Missus don't seem to set no store upon such things, nor look at the bills, nor ask no questions; and after all, what is wages to save out of against old age without perkisits? I do, I know, have the meat middling fat, and it runs, in course, into dripping, which, in course, I gets a trifle by; but that ain't like taking goods out of the house, and well nigh keeping another mouth with what your master pays for; and that's what Susan's a doing of; and I won't stay in the house no longer if it's to go on, I won't! And another thing, miss," she said, lowering her voice, and drawing nearer to Edith, "which certainly ain't no concern of mine, but which I don't like to hear: people is a talking about the bills, and how so little has been paid, and they

strange folks as nobody knows ; and altogether my mind is so worretted, that I thought I'd make bold to speak to you."

Although this was no more than Edith expected, she did not know, when cook began to speak about Susan, that she intended making these other revelations ; and anxious beyond measure that things should be set right without annoying her brother or running the risk of upsetting Geraldine, she at once felt she must alter her order to cook, to speak to her mistress, so she said as quickly as she could —

"On second thoughts, cook, as you have now spoken to me, you had better not say anything to your mistress. Go round to all the tradespeople, and collect all their bills, and put them on the writing-table in my room. I

should like you to try and do this, this evening. Do not say anything to Susan that you have spoken to me, but try to remember that waste and extravagance are only other modes of dishonesty. Mrs. Lascelles is a young, inexperienced housekeeper, and the fact that she trusts you so implicitly should make you more anxious to merit her confidence. I shall speak to the butcher, and tell him that he sends the meat much too fat, and that if he does not alter we shall deal in the town. You can only expect this, cook, after what you have told me. And on condition of your solemn promise for the future to be strictly honest, careful, and economical, I will not say anything to Mrs. Lascelles which might cause your discharge. Susan I will speak to quietly my-

self, without mentioning your name in the matter."

"Thank ye, miss; I am sure you're very good; and I wish much that you was missus, —we should be all right then. The best on us want looking after—that's my belief. I promise you I'll do my best; and when you do speak to the butcher, you won't mind saying, please, miss, it was a mistake of mine about our people liking so much fat."

Edith, much as she was worried, could scarcely forbear a smile, but she dismissed the cook with a promise to set her right with the butcher, and then began seriously to consider what was to be done. She dearly loved her brother, and at any cost to herself would have spared him from annoyance; but she

remembered Geraldine's anger at her interference in household matters, and her own determination at the time never to do so again. Yet when she pictured to herself Herbert changed from the adoring to the angry and indignant husband, Geraldine's terror and distress, and the disgrace as the bills grew beyond Herbert's means, she felt that, at any self-sacrifice, such calamities must, if possible, be averted.

When Edith went to bed that night she found the bills on her table, and with dismay perceived that the total amounted to far more than she had feared ; not so much that the sum altogether was more than Herbert could pay, but she knew it would be a great inconvenience to him if so large an amount should

be required at once. She sat for some time thinking, and then, as if struck by a bright idea, she unlocked a drawer in her writing-table, and took out a pocket-book, and from thence a few bank-notes and some gold. Then picking out the largest of the bills, she added them together, and with a bright smile found that their united sums did not quite come to the money that was stored there. Stored, for what purpose? A tear chased away the smile as the poor girl put back the small balance left of the sum which was to have purchased her wedding trousseau. It had lain untouched ever since her parting with Harry. Nothing for her own gratification would she have purchased with it. It was a small legacy left her by her godmother, and, as it were, sacred to

Harry, and, as such, not to be used for any purpose unconnected with him and the happiness which was once within her grasp, and to the hope of which she still clung. Never did Edith give a stronger proof of her love for her brother, than in thus sacrificing for him her cherished hoard. She took an early opportunity in the morning of seeing cook privately, and gave her the smallest of the bills, telling her she would see about the others, and that she was to give those to her mistress on the first opportunity. The large ones Edith took to the shops herself, receiving them back receipted, with such relief of mind as went far to repay her for the sacrifice she had made.

When Edith went into her room to

dress for dinner, Susan was there; and as the girl passed her to go out, Edith fancied she saw her give a sharp, inquiring glance at the bills and books in her hand; but it might have been fancy, and perhaps it was not much consequence if she had seen them, and so Edith put the matter out of her head.





CHAPTER III.



HERBERT and Geraldine seemed unusually gay that evening, and kept rallying Edith on her gravity. Geraldine was full of a project to return the civility of the neighbourhood to them by a party or parties in return, saying it was disgraceful, so long as they had been in Bradleigh, and never asked any one into the house.

“Our rooms are not large enough for a dance or great dinner-party, Herby darling,”

she said; "but let us have two nice little dinner-parties—that will just knock off all the people we have made acquaintance with."

"Very well," said Herbert—"begin and set their names down; here's a pencil and paper; here, you say, and I'll write;" and leaning over his shoulder, Geraldine dictated, and he wrote.

Edith sat silent, not liking to say anything, but wondering when the little thoughtless young wife would remember that house-keeping costs money.

Making arrangements for these two entertainments, and consulting with her husband what she should wear and order for the two dinners, the evening passed away; Herbert delighted to see his lovely wife so bright and

happy, and wishing she could instil some of her gay, cheerful nature into his serious sister.

When Susan came to undress her mistress at night, she gave her the packet of small bills, saying cook had desired her to do so, and to say that the people wanted their money.

Geraldine glanced at the total, and a bright smile passed over her face at the smallness of the amount.

"Tell cook," she said, "I will see about it to-morrow. This is all, I suppose?"

"All cook has got, ma'am; Miss Lascelles has the rest."

"Miss Lascelles the rest! What do you mean?"

"Why, Miss Lascelles ordered cook, ma'am, to bring her all the bills that was owing in

the place, and she did, and Miss Lascelles only gave her these back, and told cook to give them to you ; and I see all the rest of the bills and books in her hand when I went to take the hot water in her room for her to dress for dinner. I thought perhaps she was going to give them to Mr. Lascelles,—like, I suppose, she was used to when she kept house.”

Geraldine made no answer to this speech, and Susan brushed away diligently at her hair, till at length Geraldine said—

“ That will do to-night, Susan ; you can go to bed. Good night.”

This was not at all what Susan wished ; however, she had no alternative but to obey her mistress’s orders and go. Still, she hoped that

the train of gunpowder needed only a spark to explode beneath the feet of one who, she felt, knew her only too well, and who would, unless cleverly got rid of, hinder and upset all her plans.

When Herbert came up to bed an hour afterwards, he found Geraldine still up. She rose as he entered, and came towards him, her face flushed and her eyes full of tears.

"Oh, Herbert dear," she said, "I could not go to bed till you came up. I want to speak to you very particularly."

"Why, my dear girl," he said, tenderly, leading her back to her seat, "this is never the merry little woman that was downstairs a short time ago! What has happened?"

"I must tell you, darling, much as I

dislike to do so. I have long feared it would come to this. I have been sitting here this hour, trying to make up my mind what to do, and now I have settled that you ought to know it. Herbert, my own, own dear husband, I could not let any one come between us and make you angry with me. I would sooner tell you all my faults myself, and plead my own forgiveness."

"Why, dear me, what is this serious business? What have you done?" asked Herbert, smiling.

"Been a very careless housekeeper, I fear, love, and let the bills run on too much; but it was all new to me, I had never kept house till I was your wife, and really knew nothing of it; and now I hear from Susan that Edith

has ordered the bills to be collected for her inspection, and intends showing them to you."

"Edith!—I feared this," said Herbert, growing white with anger; "but it can soon be settled, as I always said it should if ever she interfered—she shall find another home."

"But, Herbert darling, I have been wrong and inconsiderate, very, and you have much to forgive me. Do not be too hard on her, only speak to her seriously, and ask her not to interfere any more—I did once since we have been married, about Susan; she seemed so vexed that I have not mentioned the subject since; but you might, and then we may go on quietly again."

“No, Geraldine, we must strike whilst the iron is hot—it is better so, it would only be a patched-up affair. Edith would say she never did interfere, and so the worry would be of constant occurrence. I will speak to her in the morning; and you, my dear girl, go to bed and dry those silly tears; you have not married a tyrant. Whatever mistakes you have made can, I dare say, be rectified. We are both young housekeepers, and must be lenient to each other's faults. The bills must be collected to-morrow, and paid; and for the future we will have a regular pay day each week.”

“But you must not turn Edith out, indeed you must not. Where will she go to?”

“That is her concern. She had a home

with me on one condition ; she has broken that, and must take the consequences."

"But try her once again," pleaded Geraldine. "Your speaking to her may have so much effect that all will go on smoothly."

"Well, do not you worry yourself, darling, any more on the matter. I will speak to her at any rate, and hear what she says ; she will probably prefer leaving herself."

"Ah, that will be different, if she prefers it."

"We shall see, love, in the morning ; but to bed now, and no more tears if you love me."





CHAPTER IV.

THE following morning, Geraldine's head ached so much that she could not get up to breakfast, so Edith was alone when Herbert entered the dining-room. He spoke to her very coldly, and their meal passed almost in silence. At its conclusion he said—

“Edith, I have something to say to you which grieves me very much. I had hoped that you loved me sufficiently to care for my darling wife, and to try to prevent her

from being worried or annoyed whilst you were a resident with us. On the condition that you by no word or deed marred the happiness of our home, you were to remain with us. You have broken those conditions, disappointed me more than I can say, and I have only to add that you must seek another home."

At the first few words every trace of colour had faded from Edith's cheek, and at the conclusion of her brother's speech she rose slowly from her chair, and looking full in Herbert's face, said, in a voice trembling with emotion—

"You do not mean what you say? You are under some mistake, surely. What have I done?"

“Done what is unpardonable in my eyes, Edith—caused my wife to weep bitter tears of sorrow. I loved her long before I would tell her so, because, Edith, I would not drive you from a home with me. I bore the agony of unacknowledged love, the misery of knowing I might lose her whom I loved better than my life, for your sake; and when an accident revealed it, and I told her I could not marry, because it would make you homeless, she, my good, sweet wife, begged me to let you remain; she felt sure you would be happy together. She has done her best, I know; but you, Edith, have rendered the home I would have made so happy to her miserable.”

“Will you not tell me in what way?” asked

poor Edith, as the large tears coursed each other down her cheeks.

“It is useless to recapitulate all you have done—you have interfered in an unwarrantable manner with her household concerns, and were meditating an attempt to make me angry with her. She has told me this bitterly weeping, Edith—imploring me with the tears in her dear eyes not to turn you out, to keep you here still, but I think it is better for all our sakes that you should go.”

“Much better,” said Edith, calmly now, for her grief and indignation had stayed the tears which had first begun to flow. After all she had done, was this to be her reward?

“Where will you go, Edith?” asked Herbert.

"That can matter little to you," answered Edith, "or you would not so readily make me seek another home."

"There is no hurry for you to leave here," said Herbert, astonished and rather frightened at her unnatural calmness. "You can stay till you find a suitable home."

"You are very kind," answered Edith, bitterly. She was only human—no saint or angel—only a tender, gentle-hearted woman, full of human frailties—and she could not help the anger mingling with her grief at her brother's injustice. He had condemned her unheard; she would not now attempt to vindicate herself, but leave at once a home where her actions had been so misconstrued, and in which she felt she could never be happy again.

“I do not wish to be unkind to you, Edith, although I may seem so ; but you must admit my first duty is to my wife. If she is not happy, it is my business to make any sacrifice that will render her so. I sincerely hope you will find a home where you can be comfortable, and that we shall part friends ; and so I assure you you can remain here till a suitable place is provided for you. I am very sorry, but not surprised. I have always felt relations could not live together. I would rather you made no allusion to the subject when Geraldine comes down,—she is very far from well, and must not be worried and excited ; let the matter rest till you have settled where to go, and then you can quietly tell her you are going to leave. Poor darling, she will not be so distressed if she thinks it is

your own will to leave. Let her think so, Edith, will you?" he said, earnestly coming up to her, and putting his arm round her; but she shrank from him, and rising with a strange look in her face, as though a fresh thought had suddenly entered her mind, she turned, and left the room.

Herbert went to his wife directly, but she was asleep, and so he stole softly away, giving strict orders to the servants that she was not to be disturbed, and betaking himself to his studio to finish a picture in which he was deeply interested, he came down no more till dinner time—the hours had flown rapidly, so engrossed was he with the picture he was so anxious to complete. He found his wife in the drawing-room, looking very lovely, and

subdued into touching gentleness by the severe pain she had been suffering all day.

"Well, darling," she said, "I thought you were lost."

"I have been busy. I have just finished my picture; and if you feel equal to it, I shall like you to come and see it after dinner. I think you will acknowledge it is my *chef d'œuvre*."

"I will come and look at it certainly, dear. Where is Edith? I have not seen her all day."

"I don't know. I left orders that you should not be disturbed, I suppose she did not like to come to you."

"Did you say anything to her this morning?"

"Yes, we had a little talk; I think it will

end in her leaving. But come, love, dinner is announced ; I suppose we shall find Edith in the dining-room."

But no Edith was there. A parcel lay in Herbert's place, which he opened with some astonishment, and saw some tradesmen's books and a note in his sister's handwriting.

"Where is Miss Lascelles?" asked Geraldine of Susan, as she removed the covers.

"Miss Lascelles has been out ever since lunch, ma'am;" and Susan gave a meaning glance at the parcel which Mr. Lascelles had opened.

"What have you there, Herbert, dear?" asked Geraldine.

"A little communication from Edith; she is gone out. May I give you some fish, love?"

Geraldine saw that Herbert was worried, but would say no more before Susan. So telling her they would ring when they wanted her, she dismissed her, and anxiously asked Herbert again what it all meant.

"I know no more than this tells me, love, and I cannot understand it; it is very worrying. Read it." And he tossed the note across the table to his wife, who with the greatest astonishment read the following:—

"MY DEAR HERBERT,

"What I have done to merit your words of this morning I am at a loss to imagine. My only interference in your domestic concerns consists in my payment of the accompanying bills, for which the

people were becoming impatient, and I knew it would not be convenient for you to do so at present, and I did not wish Geraldine to be worried. Forgive me if it was wrong. I am very sorry. God bless you both. I shall not trouble you any more, but accept your advice, and leave a home which my presence has made, by your account, so wretched.

“E. L.”

“Good gracious, Herbert! and is she gone really?—where to?”

“I know no more than you do. We have made a great mistake somehow, Geraldine. Fancy her paying all these bills! Poor Edith, I have no doubt she has gone to London to my uncle Barham; he was always fond of Edith, though he’s a strange odd fish

himself, and bade her always come to him in any trouble; so I shall go to the station and see if she went by the train, and if so, write to uncle to know if she is there. I'll ring and ask Susan what orders she left about her luggage."

Susan was accordingly summoned and questioned. She said Miss Lascelles had been very busy in her room all day, and after luncheon had gone out; "and finding, ma'am," continued Susan, "that she did not come back at dressing time, I went into her room. To my surprise I found her things was all packed up and her boxes directed—'Miss Lascelles' only. On one was a slip of paper, saying that they would be sent for in a day or two."

"That will do, Susan," said Herbert. "I

shall run up to the station directly after dinner, Geraldine ; I think Edith has acted very hastily."

"Yes, dear, very ; it will be dreadful to go to bed without knowing where she is. Why did she not tell you, when you spoke to her this morning, where she meant to go?"

"She was too indignant at my unjust suspicions to defend herself. I suppose Susan must have wished to revenge herself on her, and so invented this story about the bills. You see she had no evil intention towards you, love ; quite the contrary. We have all been hasty, I think."

"I fear we have," answered Geraldine, sadly. "I really cannot eat any more dinner. Herbert, dear, do send it all away, and go in

search of Edith. She is such a strange, romantic girl, there is no knowing what she may do."

"Well, certainly, it has not helped to give one an appetite, I must own," answered her husband; "and perhaps it would be as well to satisfy ourselves as to her whereabouts; but I have not the least doubt she is gone to uncle Barham's. The first thing when we discover her, Geraldine, will be to repay the sum she has lent us for these bills."

"Decidedly. Poor Edith! Oh, Herbert, I shall be wretched till I know where she is! Now I feel as though she had never done wrong, and that I only am to blame."

"We often think so, dearest, when we look back on grievances, and remember, when too

late, how differently we might have acted. But do not fret and worry yourself," he continued, rising and kissing his wife, down whose cheeks the tears were fast falling; "so that we find Edith has chosen a safe and comfortable refuge, I shall not be sorry, for I think you will be happier without her. I will go at once; you return to the drawing-room sofa till I come back, and I have no doubt I shall hear that Edith has started for London."





CHAPTER V.



T was growing dark, so dark that Harry Aylmer could no longer see to write at his little table, and yet it seemed too light for candles—a charming time for thinking, for indulgence in dreams, and castle-building. It was chilly too—he had felt it so all day—felt too as though all things were an exertion to him, and that rest, perfect rest, was what he needed. The fire was laid in the grate, so he lighted it, and a pipe beside, and putting his feet on the

fender, prepared himself to enjoy a quiet half hour. The fire burnt up briskly and brightly, and in its glowing embers he traced faces and forms of other days, and his thoughts wandered away until he forgot where he was; and again he lived over happy hours with Edith, before the dark cloud had come between them. How plainly he seemed to see her sweet face, and hear the tones of her tender voice, so plainly that he could not fancy he was only dreaming. "Harry! Harry!" it rang in his ears, but in frightened tones it sounded now. He started from his seat—it was no dream—he did hear her call him. The light had faded rapidly as he had sat dreaming; he could only see across the room by the red glare of the fire. Again the voice—"Harry!

Harry !” and the door shaken hurriedly. In one second he had opened it, and there, beneath the porch, stood a female form, closely veiled and cloaked.

“Who is it ?” he asked eagerly ; “what is it ?”

“It is me, Harry. Oh ! let me in.”

“Edith ! really !” he exclaimed ; “alone ! What does this mean ?”

He led her into the room, closing and fastening the door—led the trembling girl to the fire, and placing her in a seat, drew gently aside the veil which covered her face ; it was Edith indeed.

“My darling, how came you here ? What has happened ?”

“Harry, I have been mad and foolish,” she

answered. "You must take me back, dearest. Herbert was unkind to me—I thought so, at least. He has been told something which is not true, and bade me seek another home. In anger and despair, without thought or consideration, I determined to come to you. I am so sorry, darling. Take me back! What shall I do?"

And clasping her hands together, she looked up pleadingly in her lover's face. What did she see there, that she sprang from her seat, and again, in still more terror, called, "Harry, Harry!" He tried to stretch his arms out to take her as she flew towards him, but they fell powerless to his side, and, staggering for a second, he fell heavily to the ground. In an agony of terror Edith knelt beside him, raising

his head on her arm, and gazing through her blinding tears at the deathly pallid face, and the dear eyes which could no longer answer her loving glance. But soon, by a strong effort mastering her terror, she felt this was no time to give way to fears and sorrow—that she must show her love to him by her courage and usefulness now ; so having laid his head down, and loosening with her trembling hands his cravat and collar, she groped her way, guided only by the fire-light, to the little kitchen, where she found some water, and dashing some suddenly in his face, to her intense joy he uttered a gasping sigh, which assured her that he had only fainted ; but the eyes were still closed, and the face and lips were still so white. Suddenly she remembered

the brandy-flask in the little cupboard he had produced for her use on that never-to-be-forgotten day when she had fainted in that room ; and she had found it, and was wetting his pale lips with it, when a knock at the back door startled her. She paused a moment, uncertain whether to open it or not ; but the thought that, let it be who it would, she could obtain aid for Harry decided her, and quickly hurrying to the door she drew the bolt, and to her relief she saw a quiet-looking, middle-aged woman, who merely said—

“Thank you, miss : I’ve come to get master’s tea.”

“Oh, I am so glad,” said Edith ; “come here quickly ; he is ill,—has fainted, I think ;

come and tell me if we had not better send for the doctor."

"Dear, dear! ill! Stay, let's light the candle;" and as she did so, and its light fell on Edith's face, she said, "Why, you bean't Miss Huntley—who be you?"

"Oh, never mind me now—a friend of his; I called to see him unexpectedly; he was ill directly. I have only been here a few minutes. Do see to him! Look at him! What shall we do?"

"Oh! he's fainted, sure enough," said the woman, taking up his hand and striving to undo the clenched fingers. "There, you take the other hand and rub it; he'll be all right presently. Don't you terrify yourself. He ain't been quite the thing this day or two: the

nights is damp now, and he gets chilled out in those woods, I reckon. There, see, he's coming to. Come, master! Master, here's a young lady come to see you. Cheer up." And talking kindly and cheerily to him, and rubbing his hands vigorously, they were at length rewarded by his slow return to consciousness; but, alas, only to the consciousness that he was very ill. With difficulty, aided by the two women, he rose, but could neither walk nor stand without assistance. What was to be done? Medical aid must be secured, and Mrs. Walker volunteered to go whilst Edith stayed with him.

"My littlest boy's at home," she said; "he can come and sit here whilst I am gone, in case you want him to fetch anything. It's

too far to send him down to the doctor's—he'd be gone such a terrible time—so I'll let him come here ;” and in a few moments more she was gone, the little boy was installed in the kitchen, and Edith was seated by poor Harry, bathing tenderly his burning, throbbing temples. Occasionally he opened his heavy eyes to gaze on the sweet, tender face, which seemed like an angel's beside him, and to murmur “darling.” He was too ill to remember she had no business there, and that she had besought him to take her home ; he only felt that illness even was sweet with her beside him ; and Edith—she would not permit herself to think—only to be thankful that she was near, to be a comfort to him, and to fancy what her agony

would have been to know him ill and she not with him, no one to nurse him or cheer the long hours of illness and suffering.

Suddenly the sound of a carriage stopping before the door awakened Edith to the sense of her position, and to the sudden recollection that the doctor would recognise her. What excuse was she to make for her presence there? Would not Harry's secret be betrayed? What was to be done? There was little time to think: the boy had opened the door, and voices in the lower room told of the doctor's arrival. Mrs. Walker came up first.

"The doctor was at home," she said, "and thought the sooner he got here the better, by my account; so he had the carriage out, and

lifted me in, and away we come like the wind.
How do he seem?"

"Just the same," answered poor Edith;
"if there is any change he is worse, rather
than better."

"Well, Mr. Barrow's such a clever doctor,
he'll soon put him to rights, I'll be bound.
Shall he come up?"

"Yes," murmured Edith, and as the
doctor's step ascended the stairs she could
hear the beating of her heart. What should
she do? She looked round eagerly for some
hope of escape, but could see none; there was
one other small bedroom, but she must cross
the head of the stairs to get to it, and he
would see her, but surely in that moment he
would not recognise her. She started to try

to gain this refuge, but Mr. Barrow¹ was too quick for her, and he entered the room before she had reached the door. Hastily she shrunk back behind the curtains of the bed, and tremblingly she listened while he examined his patient, who had again sunk into unconsciousness.

“Have you noticed that he has been ill before to-day, Mrs. Walker?” he asked.

“Ailing like, sir, as I told you, shivery and heavy, not so joking and pleasant as he used to be; for a kinder, civiller-spoken chap I never see. I’ve done for him ever since he’s been here, and would if he was to be here for years; for he ain’t no trouble, and is always obliged for the smallest thing.”

“He is very seriously ill, Mrs. Walker, and must have the greatest care. Can you give

up your time to him? He must not be left, and to-night some one must sit up with him."

"I can sit up to-night, sir, and indeed most nights; but I must be home in the day on account of my family; but I don't know whether this young woman as has come over to see him can stay—maybe she can."

The doctor turned and looked at the shrinking form of poor Edith; he had been too much engrossed with his patient to notice her before.

Her face was shadowed by the curtain; the little candle gave but a dim light. He saw it was a female figure, that was all; so he merely said, still addressing his conversation to Mrs. Walker—

"Well, remain with him to-night; I shall

be here very early in the morning; and a nurse must be provided for him, if this person can't stay. No doubt Sir James will send some one. I think it advisable the family should be informed of his state, as it may be some time before he can go to work again. He has congestion of the brain. I will call round at the house as I go home. Keep his head cool, as you are doing. Vinegar and water I see you are using; but I will send a pleasanter, evaporating lotion; and be sure to administer the medicine very regularly, according to the directions. Good evening."

And glancing once more, somewhat curiously, at the silent, motionless figure by the curtain, Mr. Barrow departed, Mrs. Walker following him down the stairs to show him out.

Then Edith came from her hiding-place, and took her seat beside the bed, pressing one long tender kiss on the burning forehead of him she had loved so truly and so long, and mentally determining that nothing ever should induce her to leave him again. She had no one to care for her—her brother had cast her off; father and mother she had none. She had only to please herself, and so by his side she would remain his faithful, tender nurse, whilst he needed one, and after, if he wished, his devoted wife, sharing his humble life, contented to be with him, asking no other earthly happiness or distinction.

But in the still hours of that long night, as she sat with burning, sleepless eyes anxiously watching, while the kind-hearted Mrs. Walker,

having duly administered the medicine, was slumbering in the arm-chair, all the difficulties and perplexities of her position arose before her. The Huntleys would of course come and see Harry; so that if she could, as she had done that evening, elude the doctor, she could not escape them. Her luggage, too, could not be obtained without betraying her place of residence. Mrs. Walker had said that it would be impossible for her to remain in the cottage except at night, and severe indeed would be the world's judgment if she remained there alone. On this subject, after much anxious thought, poor Edith determined to consult Mrs. Walker, telling her that she would gladly stay, but that her friends would not approve of her doing so without some other woman

being in the house,—and begging her, with the temptation of good payment, to remain herself or procure some quiet, respectable body to do so. On her rousing therefore from her nap, Edith at once began the subject.

“ You’re quite right, my dear,” answered Mrs. Walker. “ Of course a young girl like you could not be left here without no other person; no prudent young woman would think of letting herself down so. But as for myself, I couldn’t do it; my man is a very peculiar sort of a man, and has his ways, which no one understands like I do; and I should not think I was doing my rightful duty to leave him to no stranger. But I tell you, there’s poor Widow Sainsbury at the park

gates, as would come and gladly. She is but a poor creature—leastways I mean, not one of your bustling sort, but a good, harmless creature, who'll sit here and be like a mother to you. You'll pardon me, my dear," she said, stopping suddenly, and looking earnestly at Edith, "are you his sweetheart?"

At this question the tell-tale colour flew into Edith's face, but at once she saw the expediency of owning it.

"We have been engaged a long time," she answered, softly.

"Well, blest if I didn't think so!" said Mrs. Walker, with more emphasis than elegance, "for there's a something out of the common way with both of you; you're as much ladified as he's what I may call gentleman-

like—just the two as would take up together, for he'll never take to none of the gals about here. Why, there was my niece, Sally Briggs; she was for setting her cap at him. 'Go along with your nonsense,' says I; 'you're not his money.' Now, directly I see you this evening, I thinks to myself, 'Ah, here's his match;' and God send he may get well, and live to make you a good husband,—and he can't do no other, for a better chap never stepped in shoe-leather. I'll see about the widow first thing in the morning, and then I'm sure your friends will have no objection to your staying beside the poor lad till he's well. It seems to me as if you was God sent to him."

And so it was settled. Widow Sainsbury

was glad to come, Harry had been so kind to her; and so Edith and she kept their watch beside him—a long and dreary watch—how dreary none can tell, save those who know it by experience—who have sat by the bedside of some loved one, with all done that could be done—nothing left for them but to sit with folded hands, and eyes blind with tears, watching the restless, uneasy slumber, the flushed face, and half-closed eyelids—hoping against hope, that when the veil was raised from those poor burning eyes, they would recognise the kind and patient watchers, and reward them—oh! how richly only they can say—with the blessed words, “I am better.” Thus patiently did poor Edith watch and weep and pray—pray for the light of

reason to come back to those dear eyes, that he might know, his Edith, on whom he called so often, was beside him—his best friend in this his hour of need; but long she had to watch, with the kind, gentle-hearted widow woman—long ere the burning fingers closed in a grasp of love and gratitude on the little hand that had ministered to him so tenderly,—long ere the whispered words of tenderness gladdened the heart of her who listened so anxiously for one word of recognition.





CHAPTER VI.



ORA had been a week in London, and was as comfortable as she could be away from home, for all were most kind to her: her cheerful, bright temper and her pretty face had won all hearts; even the fastidious, "don't careish" Frederick had asked his mother where she had picked up such a pretty little maiden, and had condescended to speak to her several times. Dress was Mrs. Aylmer's passion, and Dora was continually employed altering

and trimming her things under her new mistress's directions, and her time was thus so fully occupied, that she had not once left the house since first entering it.

One dress Mrs. Aylmer was anxious to have completed quickly, for she was going to a ball, at which she wished to wear it, and so she desired her maid, who had lived with her for several years, to come and assist Dora. It was with rather an ill grace Mrs. Dawson gave her services, for she was somewhat jealous of the bright little beauty, whom she fancied was becoming so great a favourite with her mistress as to render it a probability that she might supplant her altogether; but few could resist the infectious cheerfulness and good-humour of Dora, so that before she had

been in the room half an hour, she was chatting as happily with her as though no feeling of jealousy or ill-will had ever possessed her.

"You have lived with Mrs. Aylmer very long, have you not?" asked Dora, at last.

"Oh yes, nearly ever since she married."

"She is a kind mistress, is she not?"

"Yes, pretty fair—nothing out of the way. But, oh dear! isn't she extravagant, that's all? the money she spends on dress would keep two or three poor families. I never did see a lady so fond of dress, I think. Master gives her lots of money, but it never seems enough; she runs awful bills."

"Is Mr. Frederick very extravagant, too?" asked Dora.

"No, I don't know as he is; I should think, indeed, he's rather the reverse."

"Did you know Mr. Harry Aylmer?" said Dora, holding her head down over her work as she spoke; for, spite of all her efforts, that name would call the colour to her face when she uttered it.

"Yes, I knew him well. He was the sort for me—such a nice, open, liberal fellow; but, poor boy, I suppose he was too fond of spending money, for it seems, by what at least Mrs. Aylmer tells me, he got rather short and took some money as was trusted to him by Mr. Connolly (that's the gentleman at the bank where he was employed), and Mr. Aylmer was so angry he sent him out of the house. Poor fellow! I was sorry!

I think I see him now as he said, 'Good-bye, Dawson: perhaps I shall never see you again.' Ah! I just did cry, and I said, 'Oh, Mr. Harry, perhaps your pa will forgive you if you say you're sorry;' and he says, says he, so solemn-like, looking me in the face with his large eyes, 'I have nothing to be sorry for, Dawson. I have done nothing wrong, which is more than my father can say, for he has misjudged me.'"

"Did you know he was my foster-brother?" said Dora.

"No; was he really? Poor fellow! I wonder what's gone with him. I think Mr. Aylmer was hard on him. Young men will be young men, and it's no good being too severe. It was but the week before

mistress said to me—of course you won't mention what I tell you——”

“Of course not,” interposed Dora.

“Well, my mistress said to me, ‘Dawson, just go and ask Mr. Harry to lend me a ten-pound note; he has plenty of money, I know;’ and I went and asked him. I knew very well what it was for; she had had a awful dressmaker’s bill sent in, and she was right down afraid to ask master for more money. But Mr. Harry, he said he was very sorry, but he really had not got it. Well, she was in a temper, and said it was just like him; he’d got plenty stored away, but he only liked spending it on himself,—which was a story, if ever there was one told. Howsom-ever, he did not lend it, and the very next

week came all this row; so, of course, poor boy! it proved he had not got it to lend, or he wouldn't have taken other people's."

"Did Mrs. Aylmer ask Mr. Frederick to lend her any money?" asked Dora, eagerly.

"No, not to my knowledge; at least—I tell a story now, though I don't mean to—I suppose she did ask him, for while I was doing her hair for dinner, that same afternoon as I'd been to ask Mr. Harry for the money, he come into her room, and says, 'Here, mother, that's all I can spare,' and put something on the dressing-table; but what it was I can't tell you. However, I know the money was got together somehow, for I paid the bill myself."

"When did you pay it—before or after the

piece of work about Mr. Harry?" said Dora, trying to speak less eagerly this time, for she fancied Dawson had noticed her manner.

"Oh! after that—the next day, I think, as far as I can recollect. Yes, I know now it was the next day, because mistress said it had so upset her she could do nothing, and she wouldn't be drest for dinner, but told me to go off and pay the bill at the dressmaker's, and she'd lie down whilst I was gone. But, la! ain't you putting that trimming on all crooked?"

"Yes, I fear I am," said Dora; "I must take it off again. How stupid of me! Never mind; I shan't be long, and it's done all but that. It will be very handsome."

"Very: I reckon there won't be a dress

in the room to beat it," said Dawson, proudly surveying it ; "but, dear me ! I should carry a heavy conscience if I spent so much on my own back and so little on other people's. Many a time it's hurt me to see poor people sent from the door when I've been taking a splendid dress out of the milliner's basket."

"Well, but milliners must be employed, Dawson : if ladies did not wear their fine things they'd be starving too."

"True, Dora ; but, without extravagance, the fine things might be bought and worn, and the poor people helped too : however, it's no business of mine, and I should be the last to complain of her extravagance, when I benefit by it. La ! bless you ! she'll put a bounet on and go out to make a call in it, come home

and dash it off, and say, 'It's a fright! you may have it, Dawson.' Why, I've made as much as fifteen and twenty pounds in one season with her cast-off clothes. But, bless me! there's the bell for tea—how the time has gone, sure! Shall I send yours up, or will you come down?"

"Send it up, please," said Dora; "I am so anxious to get this finished, I would rather not move."

"All right; I'll send Jane up with it." And Mrs. Dawson took her way to the housekeeper's room to enjoy her evening meal, and give her opinion respecting the merits and demerits of her mistress's new favourite—Dora Elphick.



CHAPTER VII.

THE dress was finished, Dawson had long been gone away to her tea, and Dora's was standing on the table untasted beside her, for she was lost in thought. She had come to London full of a great resolution, possessed with the belief that she knew the really guilty party, and with a strong hope that she could convict him for whom Harry was suffering, and thus establish poor Harry's innocence; but since her conversation with Dawson a new light had dawned on her, Though still persuaded she had traced the

guilt to its right source, she had changed her opinion as to who was the perpetrator of the deed. The dressmaker's heavy bill, the asking for the loan from Harry, and the disbelief of his inability to comply with the request, all convinced her that the guilty one was her whom Mr. Aylmer, she feared, would never believe capable of a wrong action, and the great difficulty of which Harry had spoken still remained—want of proof. A bold scheme had occurred to Dora, and over that she was now pondering. If she could be quite, quite sure Mrs. Aylmer was the culprit, she would do it, but she dared not without that certainty. Would Harry tell her? He evidently knew, by what he had said to her. The best way would be to write to him, but

it would not do to send it from there, so she finally decided to obtain leave to be out for an hour or two, and going to the Robinsons' write her letter there. She was about to seek Mrs. Aylmer to obtain this permission, when she was stopped by one of the servants bringing her a letter : it was not a handwriting she knew, and she opened it eagerly, with a half fear that something was wrong at home ; but the first few lines reassured her on that score, and glancing at the signature, she found it was from Edith Lascelles.

“ Dear Dora,” it said, “ I have learnt from your mother, with the greatest astonishment, where you are ; but my astonishment will not, I daresay, equal yours, when I tell you where

I am,—with Harry, Dora, actually in his cottage, beside him, nursing him in his sad illness, of which, I daresay, you have heard. He does not know me now, though he talks of me incessantly. But it is not of this I would write to you; it is on a subject of vital importance to him and me. In his delirium he has revealed the secret of his sorrow, the secret which, poor fellow, he had so honourably kept for his father's sake. Dora, he says it was Mrs. Aylmer who entered his room at night and took the money. At once I thought of you, and longed to consult with you what was best to be done. I sent a messenger to your mother's cottage, and she sent me back word you were in London at Mr. Aylmer's. How strangely things seem working for good to Harry!

Pray help us, dear Dora, if you can. I do not know how, but I felt I must tell you this. And now that you are in the house, you may perhaps be able to restore him to his father's good opinion and his lost position. What your motive for going to the Aylmers' is I cannot tell, but I am full of hope, if—if it is not too late; but, as I write, my heart sinks within me as the thought will obtrude itself that he may soon be beyond the reach of any earthly malice. I can write no more.

“EDITH.”

Ten minutes after the perusal of this letter Dora had requested to speak to Mrs. Aylmer, and she now stood before her, outwardly calm and respectful as usual, no sign of emotion,

but one burning spot on her cheek, which could tell of the intense excitement under which she was labouring. Mrs. Aylmer, dressed in the richest of silks, was lounging on a couch covered with a dark rich Utrecht velvet, which contrasted well with the profusion of fair hair which was straying over its cushions. She had been reading a fashionable novel, and it was open in her lap, one jewelled hand resting on the page.

“What is this important communication you have to make to me?” she asked.

“I wish to ask if you know where Mr. Harry Aylmer is.”

“No, I do not; nor do I wish to. Why?”

“I do,” answered Dora. “He is ill—dangerously ill—perhaps dying. Will you not,

in mercy, Mrs. Aylmer, do what you alone can—give back to him his father's love and trust, and his lost position?"

"Me!—what are you talking of, girl?" said Mrs. Aylmer, angrily. "I think you had better leave the room before you say what you will be sorry for."

"I am prepared to leave the room and the house when I have said what I came here to say, but not before, Mrs. Aylmer. The money which poor Mr. Harry is supposed to have taken, paid, or rather helped to pay, your dress-maker's bill last April. You asked him to lend you money; he said he had none to lend; you knew he had brought some home in trust for another, and in the night you entered his room and took it; he saw you, and he, for

his father's sake, knowing how he loves you, has never told this, but borne all the shame and sorrow, the driving from his home, and the separation from the poor young lady he loves. It is breaking both their hearts; have pity on them. Bring him back to his father—to his home, if it is only to die there; one word of yours can do it."

As Dora spoke these last words, Mrs. Aylmer rose from her chair, and, with a face of livid whiteness, seized her hand in a firm grasp, and said—

"What do you mean?—where have you heard this?"

"It is enough that I know it. Give him back his home and his father's love, and I promise never to name this again."

“ You promise, indeed ! Girl, you strangely forget the difference between us. Leave the room this instant, and you leave my house this night. Am I to be insulted by a creature like you ? Go out of the room ! ” she continued, stamping her foot violently, as Dora remained quietly standing where she was. “ Do you hear me ? will you go, or shall I ring for the man to take you out ? ”

“ I will go, Mrs. Aylmer, if you will not really grant my prayer ; but you will be sorry you have not—you will, indeed.”

And Dora turned to leave the room, at the moment that a loud ring at the door-bell announced visitors.

“ I can see no one : run, Dora, and say so,”

said Mrs. Aylmer, hurriedly. Her face was still ashy white, even to her lips.

“Say you will do as I ask you first, or I will go at once to Mr. Aylmer and tell him my own story,” said Dora.

“I will not—I will not! Go and stop the visitors.”

But it was too late. The servants were too well trained to keep any one waiting, and the callers were ascending the stairs as Dora left the room. She stood for a moment on the landing to think, and then, instead of returning to her own room, took her way to the library, where Mr. Aylmer was generally to be found until dinner. Her heart beat audibly as her knock at the door was answered by “Come in,” and she found herself in the presence of

Harry's father. But what would she not brave for him—suffering—perhaps dying? If through her means she could make his last moments happy, or, if his life was spared, restore him to his position, she should feel she had not loved and lived in vain.

“Dora!” said Mr. Aylmer, in a voice of surprise; “what is it?”

“I wish to speak to you very particularly, if you can hear me, sir.”

“Certainly, my good girl; what can I do for you?”

“Nothing for me, sir; but for Harry. Oh! sir,” she continued, more earnestly as she saw his face change at the very mention of the name, “he is ill—very ill—dying! Hear what I have to say for him, and then go to

him, and give him one word of love before it is too late !”

“ What do you mean ?—what do you know of my son ?”

“ I know this, sir, that we were nursed in the same bosom, cradled in the same arms, and that I would give my life to save his. I know that he has borne patiently being driven from his home, and has worked for his living cheerfully and well, for your sake, because he would not say what he *knew* would break your heart to hear; but it is killing him, and I must speak. Mrs. Aylmer had that money, sir; she took it in the night from his dressing-case, because she had a heavy bill to pay, and dared not ask you for more money. She

had asked Mr. Harry to lend it, and he said he could not. She took it to pay her dressmaker's bill. Ask Mr. Connolly when he gave the cheque; ask her dressmaker whether she did not pay her a bill or part of one in April last, and on what day, and you will find it was the day after Mr. Harry had the money. Indeed, indeed, it is true! I would have spared you this if I could," she said. "I went to Mrs. Aylmer first, but she would not hear me, and ordered me from the room and from the house. I had no help but to come to you. His life is in hourly peril. Oh, do not let him die without the happiness of knowing you believe him innocent! He has taken service as gamekeeper at a house near my home, where you know he was

brought up—the Cedars, sir—Sir James Huntley's—you remember it, I daresay. Sir, you will go to him, will you not?"

With bowed head, and hands clasped tightly in each other, Mr. Aylmer had listened to this appeal, and as poor Dora broke at these last words into a passion of weeping, he rose, and opening the library door for her, said, very gently—

"Go to your room, Dora, and compose yourself; I will send for you again in the course of an hour."





CHAPTER VIII.



WHEN Dora had left the room, Mr. Aylmer closed the door after her, and taking some keys from his pocket, opened a small drawer in his table and took out a letter, which he looked at some moments, then replaced, leaving the drawer open, and reseating himself in his chair, rang the bell, and desired the servant to tell Mrs. Aylmer he wished to speak to her in the library. Moments, which seemed to him hours, elapsed before she came; but

he sat there, unemployed, his head on his hand, waiting for her. She came at last.

The paleness had scarce yet left her; but she spoke cheerfully, saying that she had a visitor, or would have come directly. What did he want?

"Sit down a moment, please, love," he said; "I have something to talk to you about."

Mrs. Aylmer seated herself as he requested her, and with some anxiety waited for his first words. Visions of heavy unpaid bills rose up before her, and she expected to be asked in what manner she had spent all the money he had given her if she was still in debt. The pause he made, therefore, before

he resumed the conversation, was a very alarming one. At length he said—

“Before you married, my dear, were you ever in the habit of walking in your sleep?”

“Walking in my sleep!” said Mrs. Aylmer, and she laughed lightly as she answered, for it was such a relief to her mind, the question being so different to what she feared; “no, never.”

“I think you must, my dear, have had this habit when young, and you have recurred to it again. People who have this peculiarity often take things and conceal them, actuated by some dream: and I am sure, my love, it will make you as happy as it—it has made me, to tell our poor Harry that the suspicions

against him are ended ; *and that you, my dear wife, under the influence of sleep, removed from his desk the £20, and placed it here in my table drawer. You see, never keeping money there, and only old papers, I should never have seen it but for an accidental circumstance which made me search here for a letter.* This is what we will tell him, love, if he is alive to hear it ; and if God spare him to us, we will strive to repay him for what he has suffered. Marion, my wife, let it be so." He had spoken all this with marked emphasis, his eyes fixed on his wife. Paler and paler she grew as she listened ; the relief which his first words had occasioned had given place to an agony of terror as he proceeded, and she found that he knew all, that concealment

any longer between them was over, that the idolatrous love in which she had so gloried would now perhaps be lost to her for ever, that never again would he have the same feeling for the wife who had caused such sorrow to his child, never again respect one who had so deceived him.

With a bad temper, great selfishness, and a lack of moral courage, still Mrs. Aylmer had a heart, and one which could not but be touched by the devotion of her husband; and the very fact that she did value his love had been the cause of her great error. She had wished to conceal from him the extravagance he would have blamed, and dared not through dread of losing his love confess, when the money was missed, that she

had taken it, hoping it would not be wanted till she could replace it.

Her intention had been to put it in some other place belonging to Harry, and persuade him of course that it must have been there all the time ; but the sudden demand for it, and the direct accusation from Harry, entirely upset her plans, and induced her thus selfishly to retain her place in her husband's affections at the expense of his son's.

I am not wishing to excuse her conduct, only to explain it—to show you that she valued her husband's love and dreaded to lose it. She knew how strictly honourable he was himself, and how little he could tolerate deceit or dishonour in another. To hold her place in his heart, to have him still believe

she was all that was excellent in woman, she would have sacrificed anything, but it was over now. She would no longer be his treasure, the light of his home, as he had often called her. He would be always kind to her, she was sure: did he not prove it now by his tender care for her feelings? Not even alone by themselves would he accuse her of a sin. But it would not be as of old.

Yet, as he uttered the last words, there was a tone of such tenderness mingled with its sadness, that hope revived in her, and sinking from her seat to the ground, she bowed her head—that proud head—on his knees, and murmured, “Husband, can you forgive me?”

He laid his hand on her head gently,

and smoothed the rich, glossy, golden hair for a few moments without speaking; then he said in a low voice, "Yes, my love, as I hope to be forgiven. Trust me more for the future, that is all, and be kind to my poor boy. I am going now to fetch him home. I shall tell him he was right—he did see you—but that you will not walk in your sleep again."

He raised her tenderly from her humble posture, kissed her on the forehead, and saying it would depend on how he found Harry what time he returned, he left the room to prepare for his journey.





CHAPTER IX.

THERE was great confusion at the White Cottage. Geraldine was ill; the worry and excitement of Edith's disappearance had been too much for her. Herbert had returned, of course unsuccessful in hearing anything of his sister at the station, but was so perfectly persuaded that she had gone to Uncle Barham, who had always bade her come to him in trouble, that he considered Geraldine's extreme anxiety quite unnecessary. She passed a sleepless

night, weeping and lamenting, declaring it was her fault, and refusing to attend to any comforting suggestions from Herbert, who begged her to wait till he received an answer from Mr. Barham, to whom he had telegraphed and written, but without receiving any reply.

“I assure you,” he had said, “that this silence the more convinces me she is there. For some absurd reason she is determined to keep her residence a secret, and therefore persuades uncle, who will do anything for her, not to answer. If to-morrow morning brings no news, I will go to town myself.”

But the true saying, “Man proposes, Heaven disposes,” was thoroughly carried out in this instance; for an unexpected arrival

chased away Geraldine's tears, made her forget even Edith, and kept her husband by her side ; for there lay nestled in her arms a tiny specimen of humanity, which to her eyes was the most beautiful baby ever seen, and more precious than any other earthly thing save the husband to whom she was proudly showing it.

"Is it not beautiful, Herbert darling?" said the delighted young mother.

"Well, my dear, I cannot go so far as that, really. I daresay it looks just as it ought—healthy, you know, and all that sort of thing—but it is the colour of a tribe of Red Indians, and makes faces like a young gorilla."

"Herbert, you horrid boy, you don't

deserve to have such a darling!" said Geraldine, covering with showers of kisses the wee face that had been so insulted.

"Never mind, love. No doubt, when she grows up, she'll be like you, and then I shall be quite satisfied with her beauty. But you must not tire yourself with your new toy, but go to sleep, and soon be well and downstairs with your poor old husband, who misses you dreadfully, and who, let me warn you at once, will be awfully jealous of that ridiculous mite if you are not as much with him as you used to be before its arrival."

Geraldine smiled a loving smile in answer, which seemed to satisfy Herbert; and, in obedience to the commands of that autocrat

of the sick-room, the nurse, he left his wife to repose.

Just as he reached the drawing-room, a very loud knock at the door made him rush into the passage to scold Susan for not having tied the knocker up as he bade her—he was sure that must have startled Mrs. Lascelles dreadfully—and before he could well return into the room, Susan had opened the door and shown in “Mr. Barham.”

“Why, uncle! how d’ye do? Edith,—do you know anything of her?” said Herbert, eagerly.

The old gentleman took off his hat and his gloves, which he put in his hat, placed it on a chair, rubbed his hands slowly over his bald head, and then putting them in his

pockets, stared at Herbert without replying ; but Herbert did not repeat the question, for he knew the answer would come presently ; it did at last, in a short, sharp

“ No.”

“ Has she not been to you, uncle, or written to you ?”

The old man walked from his position in the middle of the room on to the rug, turned his back to the fire, took his hands from his pockets and turned up his coat tails, and then again ejaculated, in the same sharp manner—

“ No.”

“ I am very uneasy about her—indeed, we both are,” said Herbert ; “ it has made my wife quite ill, but she is better now, thank God. We have a little girl, sir.”

Mr. Barham turned round, poked the fire, sat down on the sofa, and then said—

“Oh! where is she?”

“My little girl?”

“No, Edith.”

“I have not the least idea, uncle. I wish I could tell you.”

“You’ve ill-used her, I suppose.”

“No, no—misunderstood her, perhaps, that is all.”

“That is all—all, you call it. Misunderstanding causes half the miseries and deaths in this world. You should learn to understand the people you live with, or else not live with them. She must be found.”

“I am most anxious she should; but I felt so sure she was with you.”

"Have you dragged the ponds in the neighbourhood?"

"Good Heavens, no, uncle! I have had no such fears."

"Oh! Have you had dinner?"

"No; I don't dine till seven, and shall be most glad if you will join me. You will stay with us now until we hear of Edith?"

"Till to-morrow."

"We may hear, of course, any moment; but as, for some strange reason, she seems to wish to keep her present residence a secret, I fear we shall scarcely hear of her so soon as to-morrow."

"I have heard of her."

"You have, uncle, really! Where is she?"

"Ah! I'm hungry; give me some bread-and-cheese now, as you don't dine till supper-time."

Herbert rang and gave the order for Susan to put some lunch in the dining-room for Mr. Barham, and there was another long pause, during which Mr. Barham went to the window and looked out. At length he said—

"Do you make the bread-and-cheese here?"

"Well, they are rather long, certainly," said Herbert. "Illness in a house makes such confusion; perhaps it is ready, though she has not been to say so; let us go and see:" and he led the way to the dining-room, followed by his eccentric uncle.

But what was Herbert's indignation to find a little bread and cheese on a plate, and a glass of beer, the only attempt which Susan had made at laying luncheon for Mr. Barham. Again he apologised, saying that a mistress being laid up made such a difference in a household ; but it was gradually dawning on his mind, and had been ever since her departure, that it was, after all, to Edith he was indebted for the comfort of his little household. Nothing had been the same since she went ; but then, certainly his wife had been ill all the time ; perhaps, when she got well again, things would be different.

His uncle ate his bread-and-cheese without complaint, and then said he was going for a walk—he would be home in time for dinner.

Herbert offered to accompany him, but he was civilly told he was not wanted ; and as soon as the old man had started, Herbert went up to his wife's room, hoping to find her awake, that he might tell her of Uncle Barham's arrival, and that he knew where Edith was, which he was sure would be a great relief to her mind.

Geraldine was most grateful to find her worst fears for Edith were not confirmed, but was troubled at Mr. Barham's not saying where she was.

"How long is uncle going to stay?" she asked.

"Only until to-morrow, he says."

"He'll sleep here, of course. I suppose Susan will have the room arranged properly ; she always has when we have had visitors."

"Oh yes, that will be all right, I dare say," said Herbert; "don't you worry yourself about anything." He would not say how uncomfortable everything was, for he knew how it would distress her.

"I wonder where Edith can be," said Geraldine. "I think it such an extraordinary thing her walking off in this manner. Poor Edith! she would have been delighted with baby,—would she not?"

"Yes, that she would; she always had a weakness for such little specimens. Where is it?—is it asleep?"

"Yes, in nurse's lap. Hark! I hear the doctor: he is late to-day."

"Oh! then I will evaporate."

Herbert met Mr. Barrow on the stairs,

and after the usual salutations, and inquiries for Mrs. Lascelles, said he wanted to speak to him on his way downstairs.

"All right," said Herbert. "I shall be in my studio; come in there." The studio was the only place in the house where Herbert was happy without his wife. It had been built by the former occupants of the cottage for a playroom, and had a skylight instead of a window, that the children might be safe from accident; it was, therefore, admirably suited for Herbert's purpose. He was so passionately fond of his art, that while employed on it he scarcely knew that he was alone, or how the time went. So now, putting on his old coat in which he always painted, and his smoking-cap, an elaborately embroidered one made by

Geraldine, and lighting a cigar, he prepared himself to pass away the time until dinner.

Mr. Barrow soon demanded admittance.

"Come in, by all means," said Herbert. "Do you do anything in this line?" he continued, offering him a cigar.

"I do a great deal, but I have no time to stay now. Only I have something to say to you. I hope you will not think me interfering in what does not concern me, but you know you told me that Mrs. Lascelles had been so distressed about the mysterious absence of Miss Lascelles; and I have heard of her in so strange a manner that I thought it best to see you on the subject before naming it to your wife."

"Pray go on," said Herbert; "I shall

not think you in the least interfering, but only be most thankful to hear any news of her."

"Well, the fact is this:—Sir James Huntley's gamekeeper is very seriously ill, has been dangerously so, and I have been in daily attendance on him. This morning, on returning across the park from visiting, I met Mar, one of the Miss Huntleys, and she stopped me to know how the man was. She then asked me, had I seen the very pretty girl who was nursing him. I told her, which was true, I had only seen Mrs. Walker and old Widow Sainsbury. There had been a young woman there the first evening, but I had not seen her face, and I did not know if she was still there. 'Well,' she said, laughing, 'I heard from Mrs. Walker that she was

Elphick's sweetheart, and so very pretty ; but the oddest thing is, that we sent our maid yesterday with some jelly for him, and she declares it is Miss Lascelles.' Remembering that you said she had gone from you and you knew not where, I thought I had better let you know this much," continued Mr. Barrow. "Why or for what reason she has gone there it would be difficult, I suppose, to say, but I only tell you what I heard. I said nothing to Miss Huntley beyond that I did not think it likely it could be, and that it must be only some extraordinary likeness."

Herbert threw down his cigar, his palette and brush, in his excitement, greatly to the quiet Mr. Barrow's astonishment, exclaiming—

“By Jove! if I didn’t think so! I see it all, every bit—he’s no gamekeeper, it’s that rascal Harry Aylmer! What’s to be done? I’ll go off directly. I was sure I had heard that voice before. What a consummate actor the fellow is, to be sure! But do you mean to say my sister is actually staying in his cottage?”

“I really cannot say if she is staying there; nor, indeed, can I say with any certainty she is there at all; only, knowing your anxiety, I thought I would tell you what I had heard, leaving you to judge how far it was probable. I must go now, but if I can serve you, command me.”

“Thank you very much. No, I know of nothing you can do. I am bewildered.

What could Edith be thinking of, and he, to——Well, I can do nothing until my uncle returns. It is probable he is gone there, as he said he had heard from her. Thank you, Mr. Barrow, very much for your information, but I should deem it kind of you and Miss Huntley not to mention the matter to any one until it is an established fact that the person in question *is* my sister. Should it prove true, she must take the consequences of her own folly and imprudence. I will never see her again, nor shall she enter the same house with my wife."

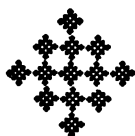
"I trust you will find it a mistake altogether," said Mr. Barrow. "But if your sister has been really seen there, she has

only probably been actuated by her humane feelings, and been assisting to nurse a fellow-creature, as many a gentle and well-born lady has done before her."

"Ah, but, my dear friend, you do not know all; there is a little family romance mixed up with this matter:—however, we will say no more about it now. I am obliged by your information, and will profit by it. Good day, and thank you."

And so Mr. Barrow took his leave, and Herbert paced up and down his studio, unable to paint or settle to anything—first determining to start at once to the Cedars, then deeming it better to wait for his uncle. And Mr. Barrow walked on his rounds to his patients, thinking of this pretty romance in

real life:—the disguised lover—for such he supposed from Herbert's remarks he was—the devoted girl, braving the world's opinion to nurse him in his illness; and a smile and a sigh met on his lips as he thought of this, and wondered if Margaret would do as much for him.





CHAPTER X.



WHILST Mr. Barrow was romantically meditating, as detailed in the last chapter, Uncle Barham was walking with a quick, firm step in the direction of the Cedars; and as he walked he took from his pocket a letter, in which he read—

“DEAREST UNCLE,

“I am in trouble. You bid me send to you whenever I was. I have done a foolish

thing. I want you to help me, and I know you will. Herbert, through some misunderstanding, told me to leave his home and find another. In haste and anger, I own, I flew to Harry, uncle. Yes, he is here, poor fellow, working for his living as a gamekeeper at Sir James Huntley's, about a mile or so from Bradleigh. I came to him, I scarcely knew why ; but I was wretched, and I felt he alone could comfort me. I did not mean to stay, but I found him ill, uncle—so ill I could not leave him. I can never leave him again now ; I must share his fortunes and live or die with him. Come to us, in pity, and help and advise us. I have been here in his house four days, helping a kind old widowed neighbour to nurse him. He has

not known me all the time. I have not told Herbert where I am; he would have wanted me to go back, and been so angry. Hoping to hear or see something of you very soon, I am always your loving niece,

“EDITH.”

“Umph!” he said, as he finished reading the letter and replaced it in his pocket. “Clever thing to do; just like a woman; always act first, and think afterwards.” And then he quickened his pace and arrived at length at the park gates of the Cedars. He knocked at the pretty lodge to inquire his way to the gamekeeper’s cottage, and the woman who answered the door bid her little boy show him the way; and so the little sun-

burnt urchin, after a long stare at the strange gentleman, ran on before him until they came in sight of Harry's cottage, and then pointing with one little fat brown finger, and saying, "There it be," he ran home again, the happy possessor of what he termed a big silver penny, with which he asked his mother to buy him a coat and waistcoat like daddy's, which was the height of the young gentleman's ambition, and of which he thought he was only deprived through want of sufficient means to purchase it.

The door was quickly opened, for Edith had seen her uncle from the window, and ran down to let him in.

"Oh, dear uncle! how glad I am to see you! how good of you to come!"

He entered the neatly-kept, pretty little room, and seated himself before he answered, and then he said—

“ You’ve been wrong and foolish.”

“ I know, dear uncle ; but he knows me to-day for the first time, and he says we shall never part again now ; so it does not matter to me what the world thinks while I’m with him,” she said, simply.

“ Pooh ! pooh ! it always matters what the world thinks. You must come home with me to-morrow. Can I see this youngster ?”

“ I am afraid not, uncle ; he is ordered to have no excitement, and be kept quite quiet. I have told him that I have written to you, and he said, ‘ That is right ; he can take you

till I am well ; and I am sure he will let us be married at his house, in pity for all we have both suffered.' And you will, dear, kind uncle, will you not?" and Edith looked up pleadingly in his face.

"What about the money story, eh? His illness hasn't altered that."

"Yes it has, indeed, for in his delirium he revealed who was the culprit, which in his rational moments he would never tell for his father's sake."

"His father's sake? Who was it, then?" asked Uncle Barham.

"I do not know if I do wrong in telling you, for in his senses he, poor fellow, would have suffered anything, as he has done, rather than reveal it ; but you are so kind, and I

think you deserve his confidence. It was Mrs. Aylmer herself. She wanted to borrow money of him to pay her exorbitant bills; he refused to lend it, and the next night he saw her enter his room and take it."

"God bless my soul! what a strange thing! But, in justice to you as well as himself, he ought to tell it all. Confounded Quixotic folly! I shall make him do it when he's well, or do it myself."

"You shall talk to him when he is well. He has always said he was innocent, and you, I know, uncle, have always thought him so."

"Umph! Well, perhaps I have. What are you going to live on when you are married?"

Edith smiled faintly as she answered—

“We have scarcely thought of that. We must go to Australia, I suppose.”

“Umph! Lively look-out! And he’s been very bad, has he?”

“Very, uncle. I have not been to bed since he was taken ill; but I am going to-night to Mrs. Walker’s, a little cottage close by; for the doctor says he is quite out of danger, and only requires care and quiet.”

“Poor child! you do look pale,” he said, in a voice which retained none of the sharpness with which he usually spoke; for Edith was kneeling before Uncle Barham, her pale face, with its anxious, worn look, raised to his; and as he gazed down on it, it carried

him back to days long gone, when he had worshipped a face like that. How would he have blest it, had it grown pale and anxious and worn for love of him ! Yes, rough and strange as the old man was now, there was lying deep down in his heart a tender memory which the pale face of Edith always awoke, and for which she had always been his favourite.

She was not really his niece, but the child of her whom, in those days long ago, he had loved with that love which man never feels but once, and never forgets. He may love again, but it will not be with the same love that once coloured his whole existence, which made him tenderly regard all women for the sake of one, and be willing to

toil "seven years, and think them but seven days, for the love he bore her." Such a love had this old man once cherished for Edith's mother. He was not wealthy then, and he would not tell her of his love. So she married, utterly unaware that the sound of her marriage bells was wringing with agony the heart of Gilbert Barham. Years after, when he knew she was quite happy as wife and mother, he told her. "Let me think of you as a sister now," he said; "let the little ones call me uncle."

And so they always had, and he had worked on and gained wealth and independence, yet never asked or cared to ask another to be his wife; but as her little Edith grew up, and he saw the mother in

her face, he determined that she should fill the vacant place in his heart. His disappointment, and his lonely, loveless life had made him, perhaps, the strange, rough-mannered being he now was; but whenever he was with Edith, and she looked up at him with her mother's eyes, his voice and manner softened, so that she could always truly say "He is never cross to me."

The tenderness of his voice now quite overpowered her—she had suffered so much the last few days—and it was with difficulty she restrained her tears. But Edith had a horror of a scene, and so, with a great effort mastering her emotion, she rose from her position, and said, quietly, though the voice trembled slightly as she spoke—

“The roses will come back, uncle, when he is well. I have been so anxious, and had so little rest. What time do you want to start to-morrow?”

“I shall go by the 11.30. I am going to sleep at Herbert’s to-night.”

“Oh, uncle, does he know where I am?”

“I have not told him, Edith.”

“Thank you, dear uncle; it would answer no purpose—only make him angry. Of course he would want me to return to them, and not—not to marry Harry; but on that I am resolved. If his life is spared, I will be his wife.”

She spoke with such resolution, that it contrasted strangely with her delicate form and face. She looked too fragile and gentle to

carry out any resolve in opposition to others ; but she possessed a great deal of quiet persistence which did not expend itself in words, but went on quietly carrying out its purpose, like the little drop of water wearing away the stone.

In those weary hours of watching beside Harry's sick-bed, when in his delirium he had told the whole story of the lost money, she had been assured that he was, as she ever hoped and believed, innocent, and determined that she would, if he recovered, consent at once to be his wife. She knew that by her rashness in coming to his cottage she had placed herself in an equivocal position ; but, as she told her uncle, she did not care what the world said

when she was with Harry. He was her world; if he thought her right, there was no other good opinion she coveted. She knew that their means must be very small, but she did not care for that, she should manage, and poverty would be better with him than countless wealth without him.

Very silly, was it not?—only a romantic girl who did not know what she was talking about would think so. Yes, very silly perhaps, but which of us would not like to be loved with as deep a love? Edith did know what she was talking about. She did not say or think that poverty was better than riches, only that she would rather be poor with him than rich without him, and so she would. She knew that the inspired writer spoke

truly when he said—"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

"Oh," said Mr. Barham, in answer to her last assertion, "you've made up your mind to that, have you? Then it's no use any one saying anything different, so the sooner we get to London to make arrangements the better, eh? I shall not come here to-morrow; you must meet me at the station."

"Yes, uncle, and will you bring my things from the White Cottage?"

"Yes. Well, God bless you! I'm going now." He kissed her very tenderly, and then said, "Which is the biggest fool, I wonder, you or me?"

"Dear uncle, you are very kind, that is

all," answered Edith, smiling. "Good-bye! I will not keep you waiting to-morrow;" and then she went back to Harry—told him gently what had happened, and that she must leave him for a time.

"But when we meet again, darling, you will be mine for ever; then I will bear the parting bravely," he murmured—and so he did. But his poor old nurse, Mrs. Sainsbury, was wearied with questions about Edith, and made to tell him everything she had said or done since her arrival: it was the one subject that amused him, and luckily both the widow and Mrs. Walker were willing enough to indulge him, for they both loved the gentle girl who had been so useful, tender, and kind, and never once given them a cross word.

"The sooner," said Mrs. Walker, winking at him violently as she spoke, "you get that nice young woman to come and keep your house, the better. Ah! I know," she said, "she's told me, and you've made as good a choice as any young man need to make. I wish there was a many more like her in the world; there'd be a sight more better men if they'd such as her to come home to."

The moment Mr. Barham entered the White Cottage he was assailed by questions from Herbert respecting Edith—he had been watching anxiously for him—and at once told him what he had learnt.

"Is it true, uncle? has she really been so mad?"

"Quite true. Is dinner ready?"

"I believe so, nearly," said Herbert, impatiently; "but do tell me what is to be done about Edith. If she has really been for four days in a cottage with Harry Aylmer disguised as a gamekeeper, she has lost herself irrecoverably, and what a position she places me in with the Huntleys! I declare it's disgraceful. I see no way out of it."

"There is but one way, and that is going to be done—they will be married as soon as he's well."

"Married, uncle! where, when, and how?"

"Where—at St. James's, Piccadilly; when—I have told you, as soon as Harry is well; how—by the incumbent or one of his curates."

"Uncle, how can you talk so lightly on such a subject? Marry a man who lies

under the imputation of stealing, and who is compelled to earn his bread like a common man !”

“ He earns his bread like a very uncommon man, I think. But hark to me, Herbert : you have seen fit hastily to order your sister out of your house ; she has as hastily, perhaps, sought another. I believe both she and her lover have been misunderstood and ill-treated. I am going to make them happy in their own way, which is, after all, the only way to make people happy. They will be married from my house as soon as Harry is well. If you like to come to the wedding, you can ; if you’d rather not, you—you can do the other thing, you know. Of course it will betray Harry’s secret, and he will lose his situation at Sir

James Huntley's: that does not appear to have occurred to them; but if it had, their resolution would not have been altered, so it was useless to suggest it to them. They shall stay with me until he finds occupation, if necessary. She goes with me to-morrow by the 11.30. I want all her things to take with me—be so good as to see they are ready.”

“ Well, I wash my hands of her altogether; the whole business is so extraordinary that I will have nothing to do with it,” answered Herbert, angrily. “ Edith must take the consequence of her folly—she is blinded by her love; but that you can countenance such utter madness is incredible.”

“ Umph! How about the dinner? I suppose it's time to make oneself decent?”

"Very likely," said Herbert, walking excitedly up and down the room, as he had done during the whole of this conversation.

"Then, perhaps you'll oblige me by showing me the way to my room."

"Oh, certainly, uncle; I beg your pardon; but I am really too worried to know what I am doing. This way."

Into the spare room Herbert conducted his uncle, which Susan had supposed herself to have made ready for the guest. But where were the neat, busy fingers which had on other occasions made the room fit for a visitor's reception? Then no speck of dust rested on the furniture, every little comfort was remembered and provided, and all spoke of the thoughtful,

careful housewife, who saw well to the "ways of her household."

Geraldine had never known this. She had ordered the room to be got ready when it was wanted, and never supposed there was anything more to be done; but Edith would go quietly upstairs and arrange it all,—not leave the room until, with its comfort and neatness, it seemed to smile a welcome on its new occupant. She knew quite well how little Susan was to be trusted in such matters; and, indeed, how even the best of servants require the mistress's supervision over their work, if that mistress would have her house look as though a lady ruled it.

But Uncle Barham made no remarks; he had a bed to sleep in, and that was all he

cared for. The following day, between three and four, two trains passed each other, running with that speed known only to such a mode of travelling; one bearing Edith and her uncle to London, the other taking Mr. Aylmer and Dora to Bradleigh.





CHAPTER XI.

MRS. ELPHICK was seated in her arm-chair, in her own place beside the fire; whilst her little niece was clearing away the dinner. She had closed her eyes, and half-dozing, was thinking of Dora—wondering if she was happy in London, if they were kind to her; and thinking how much brighter the cottage would be if her merry laugh could be heard, her nimble fingers were setting it all to rights, and her clear, ringing voice was singing the

quaint country ditties her mother loved to listen to. A sudden exclamation of "Law!" from Sally startled Mrs. Elphick out of her reverie.

"What is it, Sally?"

"Why, if there bean't a coach a stopping here!—and, I declare,—yes, that it be! Well, I never—if it isn't——"

"Wh—what? Dear! how you do go on! What do you mean, Sally?"

"As sure as I stand here, it is."

"Whatever do you mean, Sally?" again repeated Mrs. Elphick, rising with difficulty from her chair, and tottering towards the window; but before she could get half across the room the door flew open, and she found herself clasped in the arms of Dora.

"Oh! my child, my child!" said the poor

old woman, kissing again and again the bright face she had missed so much; "what has brought you home?"

"I have done my work, mother dear, and so I have come back to you. But sit down, and I will tell you all about it."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! it has flurried me," said the poor old woman, with difficulty reseating herself in her arm-chair.

"Don't be flurried, mother dear. How d'ye do, Sally? Thank you for minding mother. Is father well?"

"Yes, yes. Go, Sally, and tell father our gal's come home. Dear heart! he will be glad! You be come to stop?"

"Yes, mother, to stop always, so long as I live," said Dora, with an almost solemn em-

phasis, and then seating herself at her mother's feet, she took the poor, thin, wrinkled hand between her own, and kissed it fondly.

"Lar, bless me, to think you're back again ! Father won't grumble at ye no more for laughing, I reckon, my honny bird. We *have* just missed you."

"You never shall again, mother dear, never again. I shall be with you always now."

At this moment her father, whom Sally had been to summon, entered the room. He stood for a second without speaking, looking at Dora and her mother, till raising her head, which had been bent over her mother's hand, she saw him, and jumping up, ran to kiss him.

"So you be come back?" he said, after

receiving very quietly the hearty salute of his pretty daughter.

“Yes, father ; ain’t you glad?—won’t you be pleased to see me about here again?”

“Well, I don’t know—depends how you behave,” he said, with a smile. “The old lady there’s sorry enough,” he continued, pointing to his wife, who was indulging in that little cry which she always had on occasions, whether of joy or sorrow.

“No, no, she’s not, you saucy father ; they are tears of joy, ain’t they, mother? But now you must both listen to what I have to tell you. If I was to make you guess—oh ! ever so many guesses—you would never say what I went to London for. So I won’t ask you to guess, but just tell you at once. You

know, from what I'd heard Mr. Harry say, I thought his brother Frederick was the one who took the money, and I made up my mind to try somehow or other to find out. I laid awake nights thinking, and at last I thought if I went to London, and managed to get to the house and make acquaintance with the servants, I might find out something. I did go to London, to Aunt Robinson's, you know, as I told you ; then I went to the Aylmers', on pretence of inquiring for Mr. Harry, and, beyond all my expectations, got hired as needlewoman. From Dawson, Mrs. Aylmer's maid, I learnt that her mistress was fearfully extravagant, and that she had wanted to borrow money of Mr. Harry, that he would not lend it, and that the next day the disturbance about the loss of

twenty pounds took place. At once it occurred to me she must have taken it. I was thinking of going to her and accusing her of it to her face, when there came a letter for me from Miss Lascelles. You will be surprised, as I was, when I tell you—unless you know.”

“No; what do you mean?” asked her eager listeners.

“Why, about Miss Lascelles and Mr. Harry.”

“No; what is it?”

“Well then, he has been dangerously ill—I wonder you hadn’t heard that—and she has been nursing him. He has been delirious, and in his delirium has told all about the money, and who took it.”

“And who was it, for patience sake?” asked Mrs. Elphick, eagerly.

“It was, as I suspected, his stepmother. She came in his room at night and took it. All this Miss Lascelles told me in the letter, you know, so that determined me to go to Mrs. Aylmer. I did, and oh, wasn’t she angry! Ordered me out of the room, and out of the house.”

“Deary me, Dora! then that’s why you came home?” interrupted her mother.

“Stay, mother, let the girl finish telling.”

“Yes, let me finish, mother. Then I went to Mr. Aylmer, and told him all about it. He listened, poor man, with such a sad face—he is so fond of her; and then, when I’d finished, sent me away, and said he would see me again

in an hour. He did—it was to tell me that Mrs. Aylmer had taken the money in her sleep, and placed it in a drawer in the library table, that she was very sorry she had spoken angrily to me, and that I might stay if I liked, and that he was going at once to Mr. Harry; but I said no, I would rather, if he pleased, go home to you; I knew you missed me sadly, and I thought Mrs. Aylmer would never quite like me again. Well, he said that should be as I pleased—perhaps I had better come with him; and so, getting our things together as quickly as we could, we came off, and he went on from the station to the Cedars.”

“Well, I never!” said Elphick; “it’s a rum story from beginning to end—might make a book on’t.”

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“It is strange, but I’m right down glad my poor boy will be righted at last,” said Mrs. Elphick; “that I be: but truth always triumphs in the end.”

“Walked in her sleep—eh? I suppose the money she wanted of Master Harry haunted her—eh, Dora?” said her father, looking very knowing.

Elphick was no fool; he was very like the man’s parrot—spoke little, but thought the more, and saw and noticed more than people would give him credit for. Dora smiled and shook her head.

“Mr. Aylmer loves her so very dearly, father, he cannot think her wrong. Oh! I’m so tired.”

“My poor dear girl, so you must be, and

not a drop o' tea have we offered her. Come, Sally, like a good girl, let's see and get her some. Lord love her! I be glad to see her home;" and the poor old woman would insist on Dora keeping her place on the little stool where she had first sat down, while she hobbled about assisting Susan to get the tea ready—toasting some cakes and boiling some new-laid eggs—that the welcome comer might be duly honoured, and feel how glad her return home had made them; and when bedtime came she would see her to her room, and stole in twice, before she slept herself, to look upon that dearly loved face, as if to make sure that she was really there.

Yes, that night Dora slept in her own little bed, but the pillow was wet with her tears. She

knew now it was all ended—every happy dream she had indulged in—all, all gone for ever—he was restored to his position—his own Edith would be his wife, and she was his foster-sister, the daughter of a poor country carpenter—nothing more, never anything more to him.

The next morning, the sun shining through the little lattice window, woke her to the memory of this sorrow; but Dora had done as usual—looked at it well and resolutely, turned its ugly side against the wall, and made up her mind only to look at its pleasant one.

It had a bright side, she knew, like all troubles.

On that bright side she saw Harry happy through her means; she saw herself

the stay and comfort of her poor old parents' last days; and, above all, she saw how this sorrow led her to remember and strive more earnestly to attain that rest which is promised to those who have borne well the burden and heat of the day, and so she could say contentedly, "It is well," and rise quickly and be downstairs busy at her household duties as though she had never been away, and show a bright, cheerful face at breakfast to gladden her poor old mother, and make her enjoy their humble meal better than she had done any morning during her child's absence. She certainly did long most anxiously to know how Harry was, and felt half inclined to walk over to the Cedars and inquire, though she felt it would be wiser not to see

him again ; and she was debating this in her mind when her father said—

“Dora, I’ve a job of work to do about half a mile t’other side the Cedars ; I shall call and see how Master Harry is afore I come back.”

“Oh, do, father ! I was just thinking I should so like to know.”

“Ah ! I hope I shan’t get in no sort of a hobble with Sir James about getting him the place.”

“I can’t see why, father. Mr. Harry must have done his duty, or Sir James would have discharged him ; and if he has, I cannot see how Sir James can be displeased with you,” said Dora.

“Well, it was a deceiving on him, you

know ; I don't know as he'll like to think he's had a gentleman for a servant."

"Never mind, father, you did the best to help the poor lad in his trouble," said Mrs. Elphick, "and it's no use plaguing about it now ; you won't suffer for it, I'll lay."

"I hope not ; Sir James gives me many a job o' work. Well, I'm off—give us a pasty, Dora—I shan't be home till tea-time."

"All right, father."

Neatly and quickly with her handy fingers Dora tied up her father's dinner, handed him his cap, and tied his knitted comforter about his neck, for the wind blew cold, standing on tip-toe to do it too, for he was very tall, giving him a kiss which would have made many a man envious,

then opening the door for him and watching him away, nodding and smiling at him when he turned to look at her, as he did many times, till he was out of sight ; for he had never known how dear she was, how useful, and how bright, until her vacant place in his cottage had taught him all her value ; and it was pleasant now to take with him to his labour the memory of that sweet face, with its cheerful, loving look, and to think it would be there to welcome him when that day's labour was done.

“Dora, deary,” said her mother, when she came into the room again, “I did as you bid me about your work : Sally finished Mrs. James's jacket, and Miss Blyth's dress I sent home, and said you was gone away for three

months. I reckon you'll be troubled to get your customers again."

"Oh no, mother; by-and-bye I shall go and see some of them, tell them I've come back with all the London fashions, and won't they be glad to employ me again! I was thoughtful enough to bring a fashion-book with me for the month, and I'm going to stick that up in the window presently, and you will be surprised to see what custom I shall get."

"Perhaps so, deary; you are always hopeful."

"To be sure, mother; what should we do in this poor old world without hope, I wonder? Don't you remember my pretty little song about it? I'll sing it you while I wash up the things. There, sit you down

in your chair, let's put a little wood on the fire, and then I'll begin."

And in her clear, ringing, untutored voice—the old woman keeping time to the melody with her hand on her knee—she sang :

" Hope, thou pretty child of Heaven,
I prithee, Hope, abide ;
I will not ask too much of thee,
By my suffering side.
Grief is good for humbleness,
And earth is fair to see,
And if I do my duty, Hope,
I think thou'lt stay with me."*

Surely the Angels hushed their golden harps to listen to this triumph over all selfish feelings.

She was singing above the grave, as it were, of the bright dream that had gilded

* Leigh Hunt.

all her life—driving away all foolish indulgence of fruitless sorrow—doing her duty in the station of life unto which it had pleased God to call her, and to the aged parent whose sufferings and infirmities would have been harder to bear but for the cheerfulness and patience of this best of daughters. Well might it be said of her—“Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.”





CHAPTER XII.

THERE was great excitement at the Cedars. In the morning-room the girls were sitting with their mother; they had all work before them; but their fingers were all idle—they were talking too eagerly to work.

“Don’t you think it the most extraordinary thing you ever heard, mamma dear?” said Margaret. “I always said there was something out of the common about him.”

“Yes, but you did not fall in love with

him as you threatened, Madge," said Lisa, archly.

Margaret blushed and laughed, but her mother said—

"The citadel had been stormed and taken first, had it not, Margaret? But this is certainly a most romantic affair. You see my suspicions, too, were quite correct, that Miss Lascelles had some mental disquiet that retarded her recovery."

"I wonder if she knew all along he was here," said Margaret, "or only discovered it the day he carried her home. Oh, mamma, it really is a complete romance; but I wish papa would come and tell us all about it. What a time Mr. Aylmer stays! Mrs. Walker is so excited! it is such fun to

hear her go on! What did papa say when he came in?"

"He only just told us that his gamekeeper was a gentleman of the name of Aylmer, and that his father had come to tell all about it; that it was true Edith Lascelles was in his cottage, for she was engaged to him. He ran off in a tremendous bustle, for he said he was going down to the cottage with Mr. Aylmer."

"To see the young man? Oh, I do so want to know what it all means. Ah! here is papa," said Lisa, "coming across the lawn."

The window of the morning-room opened on to the lawn, and Lisa ran eagerly to admit her father.

“ Well, papa, come along ; we want to know everything.”

“ And what is everything, puss ?”

“ Why, all about Mr. Aylmer and his son and Edith, you know, papa. Do make haste and tell.”

“ Well, let me get my breath first. Is mamma here ? Oh, yes. Well, now I’ll begin. What do you want to know first ?”

“ We ought to want to know how the poor young man is first,” said Lady Huntley.

“ Much better, notwithstanding his parting with Edith this morning.”

“ Oh, she is gone, is she ?” said Lady Huntley. “ I should never have thought she was the sort of person to go there at all. It has been a somewhat strange proceeding ;

but there is no accounting, I suppose, for what love will drive us to, and she has no mother or father, poor girl! to guide and counsel her."

"She has, I assure you, had much to contend with; and though at first we might feel inclined to blame her, we can, when we know all, only pity and forgive her."

Sir James then told the whole romantic history, as he had heard it from Mr. Aylmer, to his interested auditors, and said that Mr. Aylmer was going to remain with his son until he could be moved with safety, and then take him to London at once, where immediate preparations for his marriage with Edith were to take place.

; "How very strange that Mrs. Lascelles

could not get on with Edith!" said Margaret; "she is such a sweet darling. I am sure Mrs. Lascelles, with all her beauty, must be a horrid creature."

"Gently, gently, Maggie," said her father; "we have not been behind the scenes, and cannot be judges; it is no doubt some misunderstanding, and Mrs. Lascelles has done as my Madge and too many women are apt to do,—jumped to a conclusion too hastily."

"Yes, Margaret love," said Lady Huntley, "I wish we could all imitate papa in his careful judgment of persons; he is never hasty in expressing an opinion of anyone, and so after his mature deliberation he is seldom deceived, and therefore seldom disappointed."

"Your mother, my girls, is a living evidence of this, you see," said Sir James, smiling.

"I'm very sorry," said Lisa, whose tender eyes had filled with tears in sympathy for the poor lovers and their troubles, "I am very sorry for one thing, and that is, that I suppose we cannot ever have dear Edith and her husband here; it will seem so funny to have the gamekeeper to dinner."

"Well, but he is not a gamekeeper really, Lisa; so I do not see any objection, after some time, you know. Do you, papa?"

"That is a subject for future consideration, about which we need not trouble ourselves. I believe, Madge, they will live in London, and, I should think, be very seldom in this part of the world: and if Lisa likes to go and see

her favourite in London, she can always do so."

A loud ring at the visitors' bell made Lisa spring from her position at her father's feet, one which she was always fond of assuming, and she had just seated herself decorously at her work as the servant announced—

"The Miss Broadwoods." It was soon evident what was the object of their visit: it was ostensibly to ask the Miss Huntleys to luncheon (they never went so far as to invite Sir James and Lady Huntley), but the real object was revealed by Miss Broadwood saying—

"Oh, by-the-bye, you've had quite an excitement here lately, have you not? We heard of it in thuth a thrange way. Our wather-

woman's thon' ith thon-in-law to Widow Thainthbury, the woman that nurthed that myhtteriouth gamekeeper, and the told uth all about it. Vethy ecthaordinary altogether. I thuppothe ith true?"

"I thuppothe ith true," said the sister Louisa.

"Do you mean respecting Mr. Aylmer's son?" said Lady Huntley. "It has been a sad story, originating in a misunderstanding, which is cleared up now, I trust, and all will be well."

"Of courth there will be nō vithiting them after Mith Lathelles' doing thuth an ecthaordinary thing. Ath to him, I think he mutht be tharming. I thould like to thee him: *he'th* quite a hero."

"Quite a hero," echoed Louisa.

"Why, Miss Broadwood, would you not visit

Miss Nightingale? After all, poor Edith Lascelles has only been humbly imitating her," said Margaret, "and is quite a heroine, I think."

Sir James, who had an intense horror of these insipid young ladies, made his escape, making some excuse that he was wanted; but Lady Huntley answered quietly—

"Both the young people have acted hastily, and without quite sufficient thought of consequences; but they are both sincerely to be pitied, and I trust that the compensation for all they have suffered, in a happy life together now, awaits them. You have not walked here, Miss Broadwood, have you?"

"Oh, yeth, we're capital walkerth."

"Capital walkerth," softly murmured the echo.

This decided change of the conversation prevented the Miss Broadwoods venturing to renew the subject until they rose to go, when Miss Louisa, who set herself up as a horticulturist, asked if there was anything new in the conservatories to show her.

“Go with Miss Louisa, Lisa dear,” said Lady Huntley; “there may be something fresh since her last visit.”

They were no sooner out of hearing than Louisa said—

“Do just tell me, ith he very handthom?”

“Who?” asked innocent little Lisa, wonderingly.

“Why, thith—thith dithguithed gamekeeper.”

“Yes, I think so; but I never particularly remarked him.”

"Oh, I think it tho intereththing; but if he had been really a gamekeeper, and the had thrown over all dithtinctionth of rank for him, and married him, it would have been thtill more intereththing. Oh! I think it thowth thuth devotion, to marry in thpite of everybody and everything. Don't you?"

"I really haven't thought about it," answered Lisa; "but I should consider it a very sad thing to love anyone whom all others I loved did not approve of; and I don't know what I should do if I was placed in such a position. But you know I can't think for a moment any nice-minded girl would want to marry a man so considerably below her in rank."

"Oh, I can. Look at 'Aurora Floyd:' ever

thinth I read that I have thought it thuth an intereththing pothition."

Lisa did not feel at all equal to continuing this "intereththing" conversation, and endeavoured to direct her companion's attention to the flowers ; to her great relief Miss Broadwood soon joined them, and said it was time to go ; and they returned home very much disappointed at obtaining so little information on the subject of Edith and Harry.

Like most events in the country, this domestic melodrama was soon the general talk of the neighbourhood, added to and embellished, till the actors themselves would not have recognised their own parts. It lasted Bradleigh and the villages round for at least a month at every dinner-party or tea-drinking. The Elphicks

were assailed by questions, and were thought quite great people on account of the part they had played in an event that excited so much interest; and Herbert Lascelles and Geraldine were so annoyed that they determined to leave the White Cottage as soon as they could let it, for they indignantly affirmed they should be pointed at as relatives of "that Miss Lascelles."

A few days after Uncle Barham's departure, Herbert received a letter from him, telling him the whole story of Harry's exculpation, which he had obtained his consent to do; this was followed by a short note from Harry himself, written with a very trembling hand, begging that, now he knew his innocence, he would come and shake hands with him, and

tell him he was willing to acknowledge him as a brother-in-law. Herbert paced about the room, when he received this, in his usual manner when excited, vowing he would not go near him, nor could he own as a brother one who had been levelled to the position of a servant through romantic folly and overstrained notions of duty. Why could he not have left England, and not disgraced himself here? No, he had done with him and Edith both. But a low voice from the sofa stopped him in his loud talk and excited walk, and brought him to the side of his wife.

She had been carried down on to the sofa for the first time, and was lying there, looking so lovely, with her little one in its bassinette beside her.

“Herbert, darling, do go and shake hands with Harry. We all do silly things sometimes, and never did we do a more silly one than in driving away Edith, I am sure. I know everything in this house is going wrong without her. Nurse tries to keep it from me, but I can see things are not as they used to be.”

“No, love, because you are not about to see after them.”

“But I never did see after them, love; it was Edith—all Edith. Had I been humble and wise enough to ask her advice, I might have learnt to be a good housekeeper by this time. I know as little now as when we were first married. I am heartily sorry for the wrong I have done her; I shall write and

tell her so as soon as I am strong enough. And I want you, love, to give Susan warning. I see now why she hated poor Edith, and tried to make mischief. Send her away, dear; we will get a new servant, and I will try to do my duty better; it will be more difficult than it would have been with her to advise me. Go and shake hands with Harry, dear, and tell him you will give him his Edith on their marriage day, for my sake, Herbert, dear, to show you forgive me for being such a wasteful little housekeeper."

How could he resist such pleading, especially when his own kindly nature made him wish to do it, even against what he thought was his better judgment?

And so he went, and that same even-

ing wrote a long letter to Edith, without one word of reproach—sending at the same time a cheque for the money she had so generously paid for him, to which he added ten pounds to assist in purchasing her wedding clothes, and offering himself to act the part of father at the wedding, if agreeable.

An answer by return, full of affection and forgiveness, gladdened the heart of Geraldine, and made her feel, for the first time since Edith's departure, completely happy.

Susan received her warning with perfect unconcern, even impertinence, and before the end of the month said she had obtained a situation, and would give up the wages if she might go at once. Glad to get rid of her, Geraldine consented, but found after her

departure that her haste was probably occasioned by her desire to get clear off with a sufficient amount of table linen, towels, &c. &c. to commence housekeeping on a small scale.

Cook had always thought her dishonest, but did not like to deprive a fellow-servant of her bread, so had quietly seen her master and mistress robbed, under the mistaken notion that she was strictly fulfilling her duty to her fellow-creatures. Cook was therefore requested to take her departure likewise, and Geraldine began her housekeeping again with new servants, and with a fear and anxiety which she had never known before.

A brilliant sun greeted Edith on first awakening on her bridal morning. Harry had arrived the day before, looking very pale

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and delicate, but so happy. Mrs. Aylmer had been profuse in her apologies, and overpowering in her attentions to the poor invalid ; but as she felt—only too truly—she had lost her husband's adoring love, nothing that she could do now would bring back that implicit belief in her goodness which, added to her beauty, had so enslaved him. He was kind and gentle to her, nothing more ; but it was touching to see him with his son. All the thoughtful tenderness, the anticipation of every wish, which had once been lavished on his wife, seemed to have been transferred to Harry. He did, indeed, appear to feel "this my son was dead, but is alive again ; was lost, but is saved."

The sacred rite was over. On the bowed

head of the fair young bride the sun had shone as the blessing was pronounced ; and as she passed slowly down the aisle on her husband's arm, an old woman, standing amongst those who were witnessing the wedding, said, as she passed—

“ God bless thee, bonny one ! The sun shone on thee, so thou'rt sure to be a happy wife ! ”

Edith did not doubt it, and as the old woman spoke, she raised her eyes to Harry's face, and gave him a smile, which told with what unquestioning faith she placed her happiness in his hands.

Of course it had been a serious matter of conversation what the new-married pair were to live on. Mr. Aylmer had told Harry that

he would make an addition to his allowance, but it could not be a large one, for he had heavy expenses at home, and his other son to think of; but Harry said that, with the little that Edith had added to it, they should do very well to begin with, and he had no doubt that Mr. Connolly, if he did not give him his old situation back, would do something for him; and so, full of hope and love, on this slender income the young people intended to begin their life.

Mr. Barham, from whose house the wedding took place, had told Edith that after the breakfast he should prefer taking leave of her alone.

"My child," he said, when she entered the room where he was waiting to see her, in her pretty travelling dress, "go and take the

little tour you talked of with your husband ; but do not return here. I mean it—not *here*. There is a little place amongst the Surrey hills known by the name of ‘Rose Lawn.’ I should like you to go there. Here is the full address,” he said, handing her a card.

She glanced at it ; it was one of her own new cards—“Mrs. H. Aylmer, Rose Lawn, near Boxhill.”

“Uncle, dear ! what do you mean ?”

“I mean, my child, it is my wedding gift to you and your husband. There you will live till I die ; then you will have money enough to live wherever you like.”

Edith had no words ; she could only seize his hand and kiss it fervently. He raised the other solemnly above her head, and said—

“ God bless and prosper Her child !”

And so Harry and Edith started again on their pilgrimage through life—together now—whether to aid or hinder each other in attaining that “ haven of rest ” to which we all wish to come at last, who shall say ? But let all good wishes and heartfelt prayers go with the newly-married ; for great—ay, greater than many think or believe—is the responsibility entailed on those who pledge their “ troth either to other ”—a responsibility for which they must give account when the secrets of all lives shall be laid bare.

Edith had never been before out of England ; it was, therefore, with an almost childish delight she visited each foreign town and village—passed over mountains and

through valleys — wandered along picture-galleries, feasting her eyes on works of art which she had before seen imitated, but which now she found fell far short of their originals—lingered in gorgeous cathedrals—strolled in exquisite gardens—her young husband, charmed with her innocent delight, taking pleasure in showing her everything worthy of note; but during all the time, pleased and interested as she was, nothing was like the joy shown in every lineament of her face when the carriage drove through the gates of Rose Lawn, and Harry—for and through whom she had suffered so much—drew her fondly towards him and said—

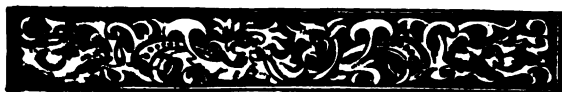
“Darling! is not this a sweet home to come to?”

It was indeed a bright spot. On its exquisitely mown lawn stood groups of standard roses, whose rich blossoms had given their name to the place, and clambering over the very chimney pots were honeysuckles and jasmines surrounding the bedroom windows, wafting sweet scents through those pleasant chambers in the sweet summer-time; but even now, in the late autumn, with the red sun sinking down behind the Surrey hills, making the panes of glass in the windows look like rubies; even now as they drove up the pretty porch along the neatly gravelled carriage-drive, it spoke of such comfort and peace that Edith entered her new home with a heart full of love and gratitude to the Giver of all good, who had thus largely blessed her.


A pretty, brightly dressed little maiden, about eighteen, opened the door to them, smiling a welcome to her new master and mistress. Kind Uncle Barham had taken care that no trouble or worry that he could avert should await the young bride, and so had hired servants, and sent them to Rose Lawn to have everything in readiness for her reception. "The housemaid," he had written them, "is the granddaughter of my old housekeeper, who has lived with me thirty years; and if Alice is anything like the old stock, she will live as long with you; but, I must own I have my doubts, on account of her pretty face. Still, if Harry will undertake to beat Edith every day, it may give the maid a distaste to matrimony."

But Harry appeared to prefer losing his housemaid to trying such means of inducing her to stay; so that, if the bright-eyed Alice was disposed to look favourably on some "shepherd swain," she saw no painful example before her to warn her from entering the holy estate of matrimony.

No, in that household peace and love reigned together. Their long probation and separation had endeared the young couple still more to each other; and their gratitude to Him who had carried them out of all their troubles, and re-united them at last, was shown in their efforts to do His will in all things; so that their happy home was one on which indeed God's blessing seemed to rest.



CHAPTER XIII.

“HAT have you got there, Dora, deary?” said her mother one morning, when the little boy that carried out the letters had put something in at the open window for Dora.

Dora did not answer for a moment; her back was to her mother, and she kept it so resolutely for a second or so, for two large tears were slowly coursing down her cheeks, which for worlds she would not have her mother see. At length she brushed them off,

and said, in her old cheerful voice, though a keen observer might have heard it tremble slightly—

“Why, mother, it’s a piece of Mr. Harry’s wedding cake! Dawson, Mrs. Aylmer’s maid, has sent it me. Very kind of her to think of me, was it not?”

“That it was, dear. God bless them! They had a lovely day, didn’t they?”

“They did, indeed. Shall we ever hear of them again, I wonder?” said Dora, with a sigh.

“Well, I think my boy is too good to forget his old nurse quite; just at first he’s too happy with his pretty young wife to think of anything; but I lay, some day soon, he’ll remember us all again. He ought to know,

Dora, that it's mainly through you he's got out of his troubles. I lay he would send you a handsome present if he only knew."

Present! Poor Dora, she never cared but for one from him. It was no present she wanted; but it would have gratified her to hear him say "Thank you, Dora," to know that he was aware of what he owed her; but he never would, she was sure, in this world. It was not likely that Mr. Aylmer would tell him, or that her name would be ever mentioned amongst them. And so she tried to satisfy herself with the knowledge that he was happy, and through her means,—that was reward enough.

"Look here, dear, you've dropped one letter," said her mother, when she had, after

breaking a piece from the cake, handed the remainder back again to Dora.

“ Oh, so I have. This is from London; who can it be from? Oh, mother,” she said, as, having hastily opened it, she glanced at the signature, “ it’s from Aunt Robinson, I declare. I’m afraid to read it. I wrote to her, as I told you, the night after I got home, to tell her I came away in a great hurry, and could not call to wish her good-bye, but thanked her warmly for her kindness, and asked her, you know, to spend Christmas with us, as you and father bid me.”

“ Well, read it, dear—read it.”

“ ‘ Dora Elphick ’—Oh, mother, what a beginning!—‘ that you should leave London

without coming to wish me good-bye, after receiving you and giving you the shelter of a home when you had not one, does not surprise me, knowing you to be the daughter of Sarah Elphick; but that, having done so, you should venture to insult me by an invitation to your house, does surprise me. James—who is sniffing so as I write, that I am troubled to write sense—is thinking of coming to you. I have told him to please himself; he knows best if his wife ought to be left to eat her Christmas dinner alone; but his love of gaiety and variety is such, that I believe he would go anywhere for a change. So if he should come, remember *it is out of no compliment or affection for you and yours.*

“ ‘I will say, in conclusion, that I forgive you, Dora, as any Christian woman with a knowledge of her Catechism is bound to do; but I *never* wish to see *you again*.

“ ‘Your Aunt,

“ ‘L. ROBINSON.’ ”

“Dear, dear, dear!” said Mrs. Elphick.
“What a sad thing it is to have such a temper! Poor Louisa was always the same, and will be to the end, I reckon.”

“What shall we do? Shall I write again?” said Dora. “Oh, I’ll write to Uncle Robinson, and tell him how we hope he’ll come and coax her to come too.”

“No, my dear, she’ll say then you’re ’ticing him away from her. Best write again

to her and say you're sorry, and say—say, my dear," continued Mrs. Elphick, as the ready tears welled up into her eyes, "that I may not be here to see her another Christmas, and that I hope she'll think better of it."

"So I will, mother dear; that will be best."

"Dora, deary," said her mother, after a short pause, "when I think that father and I are getting in years, and that we can't expect to be much longer with you, I wonder what you'll do when we're gone. I'm afraid you've done with poor Sackett, and he'd ha' made you a comfortable home."

"No, mother dear, I never could have liked him, indeed. I have no wish to marry. I can keep myself with my needle when that

sad time comes. But we won't talk of anything so gloomy. I know, dear mother, that the 'Lord will provide,' and that He has told us 'sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' "

"True; but it would have been a comfort to me to have left you with a good man to take care of you."

"Ah! well, you don't know, mother, who may come along yet," said Dora, in her old cheerful way. "I must go presently to the White Cottage, to try Mrs. Lascelles' dress on. For the dinner party, you know, it is. Isn't it pretty? And so kind of her to let me make it, instead of sending it to the town to be made! I hope I shall fit her. There is a talk they're going to leave, but I hope it is not true. Mrs. Briggs says Mary Clarke told her


so, and her sister lives there as cook. What a thing it was about their housemaid robbing them so! I never liked the look of her. There's the Huntley carriage just gone by. I lay they're gone to call at the cottage, so I shan't go just this minute."

And having thus effectually changed the subject, Dora drew her little work-table towards the fire—for the weather was getting too cold for the lattice window now—and amused her mother with her merry chatter until it was time for her to go to the White Cottage.





CHAPTER XIV.

T was not often that letters came to the Elphicks' cottage, and therefore it occasioned a little wonderment amongst the neighbours when, two days running, the little boy delivered letters there; for the next morning after the receipt of Aunt Robinson's letter, there came one with a foreign postmark for Dora, for which she had to pay fourpence. Gladly would she have paid the last shilling she owned for it. It was from Harry! In it he told her that

he had heard from his father what she had done for him, and that he believed, through all his trouble, a good angel must have been watching over him, and had assumed her form for its earthly garb; that he had only waited for a quiet opportunity to write and try to express to her all the gratitude he felt; that, seated now in a small inn in a pretty village in Switzerland, with his darling Edith beside him, he could scarcely believe but that the sad past was all a dream; both he and his wife would always remember her with gratitude and affection, and give her a hearty welcome to their new home, where they trusted she would be a frequent visitor.

Years—years after, that letter was found tied up with a tress of curly hair in a little

paper, on which was written "Cut from Master Harry's head at eighteen months old."

Dora wanted nothing more—she asked for no other reward. He knew it—knew she had done her best to make him happy, and had thanked her. He would never know all she had suffered for his sake; but she was quite satisfied now, and she laid the treasured letter by with that tress of baby hair, and tried to lay by with them any thought which would render her life aimless and useless.

She endeavoured to improve herself in her trade, to devote herself more and more to her poor old father and mother, and to make herself useful in her village. Knowing what a dangerous age it was for young girls between leaving school and going to service, she got two or three to

come of an evening and learn dressmaking while she read to them.

Greatly did the old couple enjoy this, for Elphick could not read, and Mrs. Elphick's eyes were too weak to read by candle-light; and as the evenings grew longer and colder, it was cheering to sit by the blazing wood-fire and listen to the pleasant tale read aloud, and see the happy young faces around, their fingers nimbly plying their tasks, only occasionally laying down their work to listen more attentively when the interest was very great.

And so the autumn evenings passed, and Christmas came, in his rightful garb of snow too, but no Aunt and Uncle Robinson appeared to eat their Christmas dinner

at Bradleigh: they took no notice of Dora's second letter, and so the matter ended. How can people like, in this short life, to render it miserable by constantly looking out for offences! How much better to go on the broad principle that our friends never *mean* to offend us; that it has only been some oversight or forgetfulness, never a wilful intention or wrong. Nine times out of ten we should be right, and our lives would be happier and more in accordance with that "excellent gift" we are all bidden to cherish—the charity which thinketh no evil.

And the little new-comer at the White Cottage had received its name of "Edith" at the font in Bradleigh church, and its father and mother had given up all idea of leaving,

for the story of the disguised gamekeeper had been a nine days' wonder, and had given place to some other subject for gossip; and so, as they had learned to love the quiet, pretty little place, they stayed on. Geraldine made many mistakes in her housekeeping still, but she had learnt a lesson by which she profited; and on paying her first visit to Rose Lawn, where everything was perfectly ordered and arranged, she said to Edith—

“Never again will I say relations should not live together. I feel now, darling, the help and comfort you might have been to me, and what I lost when you went. You would have been a wise counsellor and dear companion if I had only had the sense to make you so; but ringing in my ears was the foolish advice of

some silly women, who assured me that it never would do, our living together, unless I at once asserted my independence by never allowing you a voice in anything. I can only say, dear Edith, were you single, I would humbly beg you to pardon me, and come back to me once more. I do ask you to forgive me the past now."

"Say no more, dear Geraldine," answered Edith; "I am too happy in the present to have the least wish to recall the past; and I feel myself so full of faults, that it would indeed be strange if I were hard on others. Let us never name the subject again."

And Christmas passed away, and the spring came and went, and, when the summer roses

had all faded, a quiet wedding took place in Bradleigh church.

No train of bridesmaids, no bride in veil and wreath.

Her sister and a cousin, in the simplest of muslin dresses, attended Margaret Huntley at her bridal, and she herself could only be distinguished from them by the white dress and cloak which, with the orange blossoms in her quiet little white bonnet, marked her for the bride. Yes, Margaret had made her choice—she would be the humble doctor's wife, whom she loved and who loved her, and leave Lisa, she said, laughingly, to do honour to the family with her choice.

Lisa's very bright blush at this suggestion might, perhaps, be traced to a certain

Honourable Cuthbert Cavendish, who had paid several visits to the Cedars lately, and who was the second son of a noble earl.

We will leave Margaret at the church door. She had married the man she loved, and who loved her, so that she was happy so far; and she thought that happiness cheaply purchased at the expense of many an after-annoyance from his family. The old homely saying, "As you make your bed, so you must lie," Margaret knew well, and was contented to do so. She had too much good sense to complain afterwards; and ever showed how perfect a lady she was by quietly dropping down to her husband's position, and maintaining it with grace and dignity. She was the honourable

wife of an honourable man, in word and deed, if not by title, and she was satisfied.

* * * * *

There is subject for fresh gossip and wonder in the little village of Bradleigh, causing nearly as much talk as the story of the gamekeeper.

Sackett, the miller, is dead, after a few days' illness, having only recently bought the pretty mill and house; and he has left that, with all his personal property, to Dora Elphick, "the only woman I ever wished to call my wife," so the bequest was worded.

Who can express her astonishment, or say how touched she was by this evidence of his faithful love?

The Elphicks moved at once to their new

home, but the old people did not live long to enjoy their pretty residence, they died within a short time of each other, and Dora was left alone with the memory of that love which had clouded her young days, but which she never cared to replace by another. She took a pleasant widow lady to board with her, and each summer a little boy might be seen playing in the mill-house garden, for the benefit of the bracing air of Bradleigh, who bore the name of Harry Aylmer. It is perhaps needless to say how he was loved and tended by Dora Elphick, or what "jolly fun" he thought it to be allowed to go and stay there.

Yes, Dora was willing again to be the good angel of the second Harry's life, as she had been of the first.

Who would wish to doubt the beautiful belief that ministering spirits are ever "about our bed and about our path," and is it not in His power, who made them and us, to let them assume some dear familiar form, which shall follow us in our daily walk, shielding us from evil and leading us to good? Who is there amongst us who cannot remember in his journey through life some wonderful interposition between him and ill, some well-timed word spoken, some great exertion made, which has averted the threatened evil, and turned the tide of his affairs? Let us strive to cherish such spirits amongst us, and never by harsh or hasty word drive away from us those with whom our lot is cast. In the homeliest form and humblest

garb there may dwell the true heart, loving
with a firm, unselfish love, such as Dora's,
working for our welfare, unnoticed and un-
believed in, perhaps, yet proving to have
guided our steps in the right way like

A GUARDIAN ANGEL.

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